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TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE

A SCHOLARLY AND CRITICAL JOURNAL

Essays on

A. R. Ammons

Henry Green

Tom Murphy and Harold Pinter

Virginia Woolf

E. M. Forster

John Fowles

Robert Lowell

Heinrich Böll

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Twentieth Century Literature

A SCHOLARLY AND CRITICAL JOURNAL

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The Gene, the Computer, and Information Processing in A. R. Ammons

MIRIAM MARTY CLARK

In his 1985 essay Donald H. Reiman characterizes A. R. Ammons as an “ecological naturalist” and points out correctly that what differentiates Ammons from other poets is his interest in “the non-human, unself-conscious operations of natural processes.”¹ Indeed, the poet’s emphasis on process rather than on taxonomy keeps him from being identified as a nature poet or a naturalist in any conventional sense of those words.

But critical discussion of process in Ammons has often focused on natural communities and organisms—the mudflat, the elm tree—to the exclusion of technological processes like digital computation and even of natural processes of a very basic kind in the cell and along the chromosome. As information processors, the gene and the computer are important, though generally neglected, elements in Ammons’ poems, particularly the long poems.

All of Ammons’ long poems except the early *Tape for the Turn of the Year* (which has its own ghostly representation in the adding machine tape) and the recent “Ridge Farm” (in which he tinkers some with mutations, chips, and bits) begin with images of biological or technological information processing.² In *Sphere: The Form of a Motion*, the processor is the gene:

the flurry, cell spray, finish, the
haploid hungering after the diploid condition: the
reconciler
of opposites, commencement, proliferation, ontogeny.³

In part this is sheer, cheerful bawdiness as he moves orgasmically from

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"the sexual basis of all things" (S, p. 11) to chromosomes first halved, then whole. But the heterozygous world is also a metaphor for thought. "In the generations and becomings of our minds," he writes in an early section of the poem, "anthologies, / good sayings are genes, the images, poems, stories / chromosomes and the interminglings of these furnish beginnings / within continuities" (S, p. 17). Later in the same poem he writes about the poetic consciousness in ways that suggest a sexual, a haploid conjunction of mind and nature. In this context, sexual reproduction or its poetic equivalent is a way of achieving variety and change within a structure and of providing structure to the coincidental and the abundant.

In a later, much shorter poem, "The Spiral Rag," Ammons looks for a shape that will both contain and maintain the energy of "opposites attracting." Neither the circle nor the sphere will do, though the vortex comes close. Finally he settles on the helix. "The truest motion's / truest shape's the spiral's inward arc," he writes, "what a mechanism for averting, for taking in, changing and / giving out, for holding still while the motion flies!"⁴ As this final line suggests, the helix is more than a stay against confusion or a winding stair in which Ammons might discover a good structure. It is a complicated mechanism for information processing.

Like *Sphere*, "Hibernaculum" begins genetically. "A cud's a locus in time," Ammons writes,⁵ summoning with the geometric reference a genetic one, as well, to the position of genes on the chromosome. A few stanzas later, after likening rain to semen, he turns again to that primary structure of generation and information, the helix. The poem that follows—first oracular, then exploratory in its bearing—never loses its interest in the information of the world. Very occasionally the processes are technological, involving bits, programs, integrations. More commonly they are organic, often specifically genetic. "The human self risks chaos by breaking down to a flash of single cells," he notes in the middle of the poem, "in order to plant the full human code early / in the beginning" (CP, p. 365).

Although DNA and the genetic code inscribed there are among the most basic biological phenomena, they are closely linked to technological modes of information processing. Like the genes on the chromosome, the computer's elements of operation and memory are discrete, manipulable, lavishly combinative carriers of the material world. In "Extremes and Moderations" Ammons continues to use organic models for thought and organization, but he begins by applying to poetry a model that is at least partially electronic:

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Hurly burly: taking on whatever is about to get off, up the slack, ready with prompt copy for the reiteration,
electronic

to inspect the fuzzy-buffoon comeback, picking up the diverse gravel of mellifluous banality⁶

His imagery here calls to mind the pictures produced on the cathode-ray tube screens first used as computer monitors in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In his 1973 book on computers, Craig Fields describes the cathode-ray technology of the day:

With several thousand points it is possible to draw a rather complicated picture. . . . A picture will flicker when the computer cannot repetitively produce the points making up the display at a sufficiently high rate. The phosphor of a CRT screen only glows when actually being hit by electrons; it does not continue to give off light after the beam has been moved to another position, so in order to keep a point on the screen it is necessary to repeatedly move the electron beam to that position.⁷

Whether Ammons' "gravel of mellifluous banality" refers to phosphor dots on a screen or perhaps to the more fully developed cathode-ray technology of television, as some of his images suggest, this processing model is clearly a technological and not a biological one. The electrical language—flow, currents, jolt, impulse—he uses to describe his poetics supports such a reading; electrical currents are, after all, the means by which the digital computer conducts its manipulation of symbols.

Electrical imagery soon gives way to natural; its currents become currents of wind, water, and blood. What "Extremes and Moderations" becomes, at least in part, is a bitter diatribe *against* technology. In the midst of it, though, Ammons chooses a surprising simile for earth's powers, before man, to balance and restore herself. "How well it was! how computer-like in billionths the / administration and take of the cure" (*SLP*, p. 62).

While the computer's presence in the opening lines of "Extremes and Moderations" is spectral at best, it recalls a connection Ammons makes a year or two earlier in "Essay on Poetics" between the poem and other modes—organic and inorganic—of information processing. The poem, he argues, is "the symbolical representation of the ideal organization, / whether the cell, the body politic, the business, the religious / group, the university, computer or whatever" (*CP*, p. 315).

Of this handful of organizations, he considers only the cell and the computer very fully. His use of the computer is extensive, indisputable. The sheer number of words (bit, string, core, tree, toggle, printout,

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switch, progressions) Ammons uses which had, by the late 1960s when the poem was written, specialized meanings in the field of computer science is persuasive. As a trained scientist and a reader of *Scientific American*, which published numerous articles on computers during that period and devoted an entire issue⁸ to the subject a couple of years before "Essay" first appeared, Ammons must have been very much aware of technological advances and the resonances of these words.

Ammons' concerns in "Essay" are several: the relationship between the one and the many, the linear and the hierarchical, the abstract and the concrete, the long poem and the short; the array of symbolic representations of reality and the problem of how reality, its shape and its motions, is to be rendered. In most of Ammons' calculations, the computer stands not in opposition to the poem or to the organic forms but parallel to them as a representation of "ideal organization" and a processor of the world's vast information.

In the early stanzas of the poem, Ammons depicts the lyric poem (in contrast to the long poem) as a graph. The language of the lines suggests a graph produced by a computer. He speaks of "information / totally processed, interpenetrated into / wholeness where / a bit is a bit, a string a string" (*CP*, p. 296). Such a graph of the world is "unbelievable," he contends, but in the long poem that follows, the function of the computer extends far beyond the conversion of bits of information into a graphic representation, and this is, in an important sense, Ammons' point.

Having used the computer—its most basic unit of storage and logic, of calculation and operation, the bit; and one of its products, the graph—as the emblem of the lyric, Ammons goes on to find in the same technology a model for the long poem. In his good essay on Ammons, Frederick Buell is the first to describe what he identifies as a cybernetics model for "Essay." Transforming the world into information bits as Ammons does in this poem, he argues, "means first an act of abstraction and second a kinetic act of relation of the parts." As a model for this, though one unequal to poetry, Buell suggests the computer. "Just as computers in action retain information by rapid circulation of it," he notes, "so Ammons' verse retains its meaning in its mobility."⁹ This principle of meaning in mobility is evident when Ammons observes that "motion and artificiality (the impositional remove from reality) / sustain language" and a few stanzas earlier when he warns, "stop on any word and language gives way" (*CP*, p. 298).

Ammons' poetics in "Essay," then, are abstract, nonlinear, less

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rational than summary, and assimilative. "If I took a single thread from a single cluster," he speculates,

viewed it, explained it, presented it, would
I not be violating my reality into artificial clarity and my
bundles into artificial linearity:

(CP, p. 301)

The poem functions as a transformer of the world, its hierarchies and communities, into manipulable symbols. Elm tree and mudflat, galaxy and pasture, being and event are rendered here into language and into what Ammons identifies as "clusters of entanglement" (*CP*, p. 301).

Like the gene, the poem encodes and structures reality. But the transformational circuitry of the poem resembles, Ammons himself contends, the circuitry of the computer. At one key point in "Essay" he compares the work of the poem to the work of converting material to a binary state, the essence of "bit nature" and the only state in which information is processed by the digital computer. "I would say," he writes, "the problem is scientific—how is reality to be / rendered: how is 4,444 to be made 444 and 44 and 1" (*CP*, p. 310).

Given Ammons' own interest in the terms and functions of the computer and his professed engagement with "tiny sets and systems of energy" (*CP*, p. 306), it is both reasonable and suggestive to pursue a little further the influence of "bit nature" and binarity on the poem. Walter J. Ong's premise in "Romantic Difference and Technology"¹⁰ —that technology alters poetics—is an important one applied to a poet like Ammons, whose awareness of technologies is considerable and whose work may anticipate change on a broader scale.

Several aspects of computer technology are particularly suggestive. One is the magnetic core, among the most common modes of information storage in computers from the mid-1940s to the mid-Seventies. The core is a doughnut-shaped ring less than 1/8 inch in diameter and made of ferromagnetic material which can be magnetized in either a clockwise or a counterclockwise direction. Magnetized in either direction, the ring retains its condition for an indefinite period of time. An electric current run through the doughnut on a wire can change the direction of magnetization instantly. The single core is not much more complicated than a light switch (also a memory device), but organized into a memory system it becomes the basis for extensive operations. Such organization is based on a network or lattice of wires at whose intersections the cores are placed.

Some of the many cores in "Essay" are geological; others recall the cores (and nodes and clusters) of Pound's vorticism; but some also

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suggest the computer's centers of information and memory. "This is a point of provisional / summation," Ammons writes, referring both to the moment and to the nature of the long poem:

hence, the *then's*, *still's*, and *buts*:
 a point of entangling toward the intertwining of a core
 a core
 involving every thread:

(CP, p. 299)

Like the core, Ammons' "bundles" and "clusters" describe a convergence of "threads," a locus and interchange of information. It is worth noting that one advantage of the magnetic-core device among memory designs is that it allows what is called "random-access memory" in which, one *Scientific American* article points out, access to stored material is independent of "the sequence in which words are entered or extracted."¹¹

In ways that are perhaps related to random-access memory, Ammons resists sequence and linearity in "Essay." Despite the necessity of syntax, he struggles for ways to describe the world in terms of cores and bundles. "Hue a middle way, the voice / replied," to the dilemma of confinement in a linear mode, "which is what I'm doing the best I can, / that is to say with too many linking verbs" (*CP*, p. 302). But it is a typographical problem as well as a syntactical one. "If I broached, as I seem to be doing, too many clusters," he asks, "would I not be violating this typewriter's mode into nonsense" (*CP*, pp. 301–02). The violation of the typewriter's mode is a shift to the computer's mode of cores and switches. More than a decade later, in a poem about erasure, in imagery that suggests word processing and the CRT screen as palimpsest, Ammons calls "hard writing" "the inchipped and scrawled,"¹² describing in his single word "inchipped" both the most ancient and the most modern ways to preserve language.

The bit—not the information bit of cybernetics but the binary digit and the two-state device that represents it in the digital computer—is also, as I have already suggested, an important element in Ammons' poem. Like the magnetic core, its powers to shape the poem are limited by the demands of syntax and typography. Unless the poet abandons language, reality cannot be made binary or reduced from 4.444 to 1. However far Ammons ventures from linear and sequential modes, without the printout into syntax, code remains code, whether it is genetic or digital.

Ammons' wish to be provisional in his summation of things may itself be anti-binary, despite his undeniable interest in binary

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representations of reality. It is speculative but not, I think, idly so to suggest that Ammons sets against the computer's "And," "Or," and "Not"—the three types of circuit which form a functionally complete set capable of performing any arbitrary logical function—his own provisional "*then's*, *still's*, and *but's*" (*CP*, p. 299). Finally, the world with its complexity and its difficult truth defeats the computer. "More takes place by way / of event, disposition, and such," Ammons remarks, "in a single cell than any computer / we now have could keep registration of, given the means of deriving / the information" (*CP*, p. 308).

But there are very significant binary gestures and structures in the poem. Ammons deals in exclusive pairs: linear and nonlinear, lyric and nonlyric, abstract and concrete, bit and configuration, one and many. He uses the phrase as his unit of composition and so approximates memory elements (cores, tangles, bundles) and logic elements (bits, circuits). The character and behavior of many of Ammons' phrases, like the behavior of the logic elements of the computer, are determined by the amount and the path of energy flowing into them. Phrases like "they gather and stay," "a poem is the same way," "I believe in it"—isolated by colons—are charged with meaning by the grammatical and symbolic energy of the phrases that precede them. So characterized, they charge subsequent phrases until an operation or a configuration is complete.

As a whole, "Essay" is binary in one important respect already suggested by Buell's argument: no single bit or phrase or circuit is meaningful apart from the entire operation. The bits into which the world is translated are significant and true only as many. One is meaningful only among many. To separate a single phrase from the poem is almost always to be left with something both grammatically and substantively partial or ambiguous. The infrequency of complete sentences in "Essay" reflects the unlikelihood, perhaps the impossibility, of complete operations short of the poem itself.

When William Carlos Williams writes in his introduction to *The Wedge*, that "a poem is a small (or large) machine made of words,"¹³ he argues for unsentimentality, efficiency, and fidelity to the raw materials out of which the poem is wrought. For Ammons, whose debt to Williams is well established, the poem is also, in a sense, a machine made out of words. Like Williams, Ammons takes as his element in "Essay" not "reality" but "an invented system of signs."¹⁴ Like Williams he rejects the sentimentally symbolic.

But ten years after the last book of *Paterson*, Ammons' machine is of a different sort; its internal economies, its circuits of memory and logic

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are differently defined. Some of this is evident when, in the midst of "Essay" and a meditation on symbol, Ammons turns with variations (Buell calls them, significantly, a printout) to Williams' most famous assertion:

"no ideas but in
things" can then be read into alternatives—"no things but
in ideas"
"No ideas but in ideas," and "no things but in things": one
thing
always to keep in mind is that there are a number of
possibilities:
(*CP*, p. 308)

These possibilities arise from the fertility of language and of the natural world, but among the mechanisms capable of sustaining at least some of them is the computer.

Another is the poem itself. Ammons calls the poem the "symbolic representation of the ideal organization" (*CP*, p. 315). If the poem stands in a metaphoric relationship to the computer as organization (as Ammons has it in "Essay"), its relationship to the computer as information processor is more nearly metonymic. The plurality of worlds which gives rise to metaphor is richly evident in "Essays on Poetics," and the association of the computer with the cell, the business, the university, even the mudflat must always be in one sense metaphoric. But there is also a single world of discourse—the world itself and the rendering of it into salience. In this context, the work of the poem is metonymic; it is contiguous with the work of the elm tree, the body, and the bits and cores of the computer.

The contiguity of poetry to systems, organic and inorganic, is also acknowledged in Ammons' more recent poetry. In "The Fairly High Assimilation Rag," systems philosophical, electronic, and familial are assimilated. "The one:many's the metaphysical," he notes:

wherein we entertain systems high and low, sharp and
fuzzy, radiant and drained, pertaining to most anything:
still, we don't look to the wiring for immediate
help or hope as often as to the family vacations¹⁵

Even in "Singing & Doubling Together," which celebrates the transcendent, he turns to the imagery and language of systems. "You are there beyond / tracings flesh can take," he writes, "and farther away surrounding and informing the systems."¹⁶ And in a recent poem, "Recoveries," he considers the way three systems—the universe, the

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gene pool, and the poem—dissolve, consolidate, and are renewed. The universe throws off, cuts back, entangles into “new knots of concentration & high condition.” The genetic material defends itself against real accident and loss by “extravagant loss along the / edging peripheries.” Poetry responds to entropy with “minor countermotions,” from which come “flares of form, modes of slim / continuance, mounting / lofts, mingling seed” (SV, pp. 118–19).

“Where does the tiny whining, / insisting energy come from that / sings stuff back together” (SV, p. 118), the poet wonders in the midst of that poem. The answer here is that it arises from the poem, that the song renews itself and the universe. In Ammons’ work the material and information of the world is carried in bits and cells, in clouds and leaves the helices. His poems take account of such minutiae, such diversity and—perhaps far better than any computer or chromosome—assimilate it, sing it back together.

¹ Donald H. Reiman, “A. R. Ammons: Ecological Naturalism and the Romantic Tradition,” *Twentieth Century Literature*, 31 (1985), 23.

² A. R. Ammons, *Tape for the Turn of the Year* (New York: Norton, 1965). “Ridge Farm” appears in A. R. Ammons, *Sumerian Vistas* (New York: Norton, 1987), pp. 3–41. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as SV.

³ A. R. Ammons, *Sphere: The Form of a Motion* (New York: Norton, 1974), p. 11. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as S.

⁴ A. R. Ammons, *Diversifications* (New York: Norton, 1975), p. 7.

⁵ A. R. Ammons, *Collected Poems 1951–1971* (New York: Norton, 1972), p. 351. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as CP.

⁶ A. R. Ammons, *Selected Longer Poems* (New York: Norton, 1972), p. 53. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as SLP.

⁷ Craig Fields, *About Computers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop, 1973), p. 58.

⁸ *Scientific American*, 215, No. 3 (1966).

⁹ Frederick Buell, “‘To Be Quiet in the Hands of the Marvellous’: The Poetry of A. R. Ammons,” *Iowa Review*, 8, No. 1 (1977), 82.

¹⁰ Walter J. Ong, *Rhetoric, Romance and Technology* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 255–83.

¹¹ David C. Evans, “Computer Logic and Memory,” *Scientific American*, 215, No. 3 (1966), 75–82.

¹² A. R. Ammons, *Worldly Hopes* (New York: Norton, 1982), pp. 23–24.

¹³ Williams Carlos Williams, “Author’s Introduction to *The Wedge*, 1944,” in *Selected Essays of William Carlos Williams* (New York: Random House, 1954), p. 256.

¹⁴ A. R. Ammons, “A Note on Incongruence,” *Epoch*, 15 (1966), 192.

¹⁵ A. R. Ammons, *Lake Effect Country* (New York: Norton, 1983), p. 9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

The Edge of Night: Figures of Change in Henry Green's *Concluding*

MARK A. R. FACKNITZ

Henry Green, or Henry Vincent Yorke (1905–1974), is a badly neglected novelist, yet he is important enough that it has become commonplace to hear his readers mention regretfully that he is badly neglected. He is best known for his novel *Loving* (1945), though even here Green is typically difficult, for he employs a hybrid of cinematic and figurative technique, and, thrust into the middle of matters as they are, characters and readers are apt to suffer estrangement, to feel deafened by sounds and blinded by sights that they cannot comprehend. There are several other causes for Green's obscurity, not the least of which were the author's lifelong reluctance to advertise himself, and his careful and lyrical craftsmanship, a manner that placed him outside the ordinary boundaries of English literary practice in a period characterized by strident experimentation on one side and the rise of the proletarian novel on the other.

An aristocrat, industrialist, and an unremitting symbolist, Green tried to keep himself apart from politics, literary and otherwise, yet the General Strike, the Great Depression, and World War II were scarcely avoidable. The political life, or its necessity, represents a malignant interloper which the novelist Green, supremely concerned with the maintenance of the private psychic life, seeks to isolate, then to neutralize, and at last exclude from the body of fiction. At all points in his career, Green was afflicted with an overbearing pessimism. In *Blindness* (1926) he investigates the psychological consequences of losing one's sight; in *Living* (1929), a proletarian novel, he describes a world of

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nearly invincible determinism. The theme continues in *Party Going* (1939), in which he subjects a party of rich young people to the symbolic claustrophobia of fog and a terminus hotel the iron fire doors of which have been dropped to keep out the gathering crowd of working-class commuters. His pessimism is fiercest in his autobiography, *Pack My Bag* (1940), written during the overwhelming anxiety of 1939, when Green expected he would die in a war whose point he could not understand. Finally, the war novels *Caught* (1943) and *Back* (1946) pose the question of how to continue after one has been stripped, through no fault of one's own, of all that gave life comfort and meaning.

My intention is to discuss Green's artistic effort to evade his personal pessimism and to discern how he responded first to the deterioration of symbolic meaning in the face of radical displacements of British life during the era of the great wars and, second, how he came to affirm an inhuman but perduring capacity of symbols to transcend political life and all of its insolent catastrophes. One novel offers a particularly good locus for discussion. In the context of Green's life and work, *Concluding* (1948)¹ merits its title, for on one level it proposes a cruel irony: Britain has survived the Nazi holocaust only to die of bureaucratic suffocation. Though not his final work, it is the last novel in which Green exploits the potentialities of a rich, complicated, and at moments mystically sustaining symbology that he has been elaborating since *Blindness* and *Living*. *Concluding*, which Eudora Welty called "that novel of projections, protractions, long shots, and shadows flying ahead, a slow fall,"² is the last work to assert the power of symbols to soften the effects of war and totalitarianism on the private self. Though this is an indirect process, it is nevertheless an aggressive one, and so *Concluding* is arguably a political novel by a novelist who asserted, often and even vehemently, that he had no interest in politics.³

The working title of the novel was *Dying*,⁴ and the fact emphasizes the human and transparent potentiality of many of *Concluding*'s figures; for example, "a moon which, flat sovereign red gold, was already poised full faced to a dying world" (p. 177), or "a single pigeon, black in thickening sky, flew swift and on past the Park" (p. 187). Such signs appear to be exclusively tropes of Thanatos, yet in *Concluding* Green locates the source of symbols beyond the limits of consciousness and civilization, and for death to be a referent, signs must be mistakenly subordinated to a human will to power that seeks to (re)create nature in humanity's image. The intent of this essay is to show that *Concluding*'s symbols express a paradoxical optimism. They cannot compensate for the death of civilization; instead they call into question the wisdom of

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wishing for civilization's survival in any traditional form. Thus we arrive at an irony that we cannot conceive: the greatest compensation we can have for the end of civilization is the knowledge that though all transparent signs will be washed away in the sea change, one might say, corrupting D. H. Lawrence, the incomprehensible capacity of nature to offer symbol-stuff will roar on.

One should pair *Concluding* with George Orwell's *1984* (1949),⁵ for its author is alert to the same threats and makes much the same argument against technocratic and totalitarian society as Orwell, but while Orwell is urgently didactic and fiercely partisan in the struggle between individual and megastate, Green responds with a quiet and deeply figured novel. Green does not subject his characters to the direct tyranny of Big Brother; rather, he removes them to the periphery, and the story passes in a single and not terribly remarkable day at an old mansion transformed into a girls' school for future bureaucrats, a quiet outpost of the state, though one which runs the risk of being turned into a pig farm any day. Green opposes the destruction of symbolic values and the rise of managerial mediocrity with the calmly classical unities and powerful organic symbols of *Concluding*.⁶

The modernists who flourished after World War I tended to respond to the chaos of signification with a rage for order, an overtly neoclassical reassertion of structure and form. In three of Green's novels the use of classical unities is particularly important. *Party Going* is unified by the train station and terminus hotel, *Loving* by Kinalty Castle and its grounds, and *Concluding* by the building and park of the institute. Time varies in the three, yet *Party Going* is tightly circumscribed by its four hours of waiting; *Loving*'s much wider time span is composed of several linked units, each tightly unified; *Concluding* takes place between a milky dawn and a moonlit midnight and within a radius of several hundred yards. In each of the three novels, Green creates a character who draws together an otherwise dispersed group of characters. Max Adey is the rich and capricious young man who stages the excursion that collects the guests in *Party Going*; as butler, Raunce connects the several spheres of *Loving* by acting as go-between for upstairs and below; Mr. Rock may slide out of sight for several scenes, but as Edge's antagonist, Elizabeth's protector, and the object of the girls' affection, he continues to motivate action and dialogue even when he is offstage.

But what does such artificial unity get Green? By so narrowly defining the time and place of *Concluding*, Green can ignore the compelling questions that would overtake a novel not so arbitrarily

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bounded. The chief source of dramatic tension in the novel is the disappearance of Mary and Merode, and Mary is still missing when Rock goes home to bed and the novel ends. Similarly, readers do not know if Rock will be allowed to keep his house, if Sebastian Birt will get the sack, or if the missing animals will make their way home. Thus, Green makes one of the more important points of the novel: in spite of the structures of order and closure that we try to impose on life, there are no real conclusions and human experience is perpetually unsettled. Moreover, the use of classical structures simplifies the positioning of an alien or exterior reality, one that threatens to invade the precincts of the novel but never quite arrives. Green isolates the present from any other temporal or spatial extension, and this move assists him in making an acute contrast between the mundanity of the human present and the extravagance of the oceanic, avian, and floral symbols to which he gives a last outing in *Concluding*.

In *Concluding*, Green describes a future megastate with a training institute that transforms and defaces a fine old country house, and he fills the house with a self-righteous headmistress and several pusillanimous male teachers. The "guv'nor," Miss Edge, is a grotesque vision of what happens when authority is turned over to selfish and incompetent bureaucrats. Against her Green holds old Mr. Rock, a man in his late seventies, a scientist whose Great Theory has gained him a sinecure and a cottage on the grounds of the institute. Edge wants the cottage for a furnace tender whom she hopes to hire and because she finds Rock's independence of her insufferable. Though Rock's health is good, he cannot outlast Edge and his passing will represent the end of the vestiges of liberal civilization. Yet his antique power, endowed with grace, steadfastness, and intellectual agility, is still strong enough to make Rock dangerous to Edge (he is also close to a super-bureaucrat, the fearsome Swaythling), and he can still protect Elizabeth, a gentle young woman who could not abide the service and so has come back to her grandfather's care. Meanwhile the state managers in London keep on planning an anonymous brand of totalitarian egalitarianism intended to level and regularize rather than promote freedom and genius of the antique type that Rock represents.

This is not civilization at the crossroads but humanity at the abyss, yet readers have been mistaken in taking *Concluding* as a wholly pessimistic novel.⁷ Rock and his neurasthenic granddaughter make their way from his cottage to the mansion for the founder's day dance and he tells her, "Don't be afraid of life, Liza," and explains "Everything settles itself in the end. I've lived long enough to know that" (p. 176).

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She agrees, but cannot be completely convinced, for "she could see his face" and "she noted it was red with more than sunset, and pucker'd into deep wrinkles, an infallible sign of distress." Rock suppresses his fear, for he recalls that the doctors have said that Elizabeth must not be upset, and he continues to talk in palliatives. But, as in many of Green's novels, characters may hide their thoughts, yet they cannot control the signs that emerge from the figure world and comment on their plight:

as they came to where the trees ended, and blackbirds, before roosting, began to give the alarm in earnest, some first starlings flew out of the sky. Over against the old man and his granddaughter the vast mansion reflected the vast red; sky above paled while to the left it outshone the house, and more starlings crossed. After which these birds came in hundreds, then suddenly by legion, black and blunt against faint rose. They swarmed above the lonely elm, they circled a hundred feet above, until the leader, followed by ever greater numbers, in one broad spiral led the way down and so, as they descended through falling dusk in a soft roar, they made, as they had that dawn, a huge sea shell that stood proud to a moon which, flat sovereign red gold, was already poised full faced to a dying world. (pp. 176-77)

Shortly later "a single pigeon, black in thickening sky, flew swift and on past the Park" (p. 187). Such are not exclusively images of resignation or defeat. The cycles of the moon and the repeated circlings of the birds at dawn and dusk are pessimistic only when construed as projections of human cycles, the death of the individual or his particular phase of civilization, while the mansion, as an artifact of a lost culture, is necessarily an image of doom when covered with fiery evening light. But these are particular and transient assignments of meaning, dependent upon our sentimental and conventional attachment to Rock and his culture. As natural images, the cycles of moon, birds, and light stand for endurance and renewal, and they reveal a deeper, mystical optimism that perhaps cannot mitigate the death of individuals and cultures, though they portend renaissance. Thus, in purely human terms, tropes like the tide, the spiraling of blackbirds, at the sunset express a dying world. In natural terms they all repeat the archetype of cycles beyond culture, promising renaissance, albeit without memory of the previous major phase.⁸

In "Structure and Texture in Henry Green's Latest Novels," A. Kingsley Weatherhead saw "a strangely intimate relationship between content and form," one in which structure "virtually fails to govern at all" and so Green's figurative style comes to enjoy "not merely

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democracy but the complete anarchy of the Imagist poem where structure bows out entirely in favor of the autonomy of the texture."⁹ Of course, structure does not disappear; rather, the severe and arbitrary unities of time and space have greatly simplified the relation of structure to texture, and, indeed, figurative and enigmatic language refers not to the here and now of *Concluding*, but occurs in the present and points to the exterior world of nature and signs as well as to the past and the future. In other words, it is the function of the textural or poetic surface of the novel to elude, evade, even to transcend, the prosaic and material functions of structure, the day, the place, and emotional state in which various people go about their variously silly business.

The contrast implies an argument on Green's part against the acculturation of the poetic principle, for the imagination must necessarily abide with obscure images and fetishes, or in harmless warrens of adolescent girls, and so poetry is antithetical to the here and now, while the constitution of the present is necessarily substantial and hence mundane. The present is also the only time we can seize, and the only time in which we can make time seem orderly and intelligible, while historic and future time are necessarily imaginary. Weatherhead correctly reads the central political tension of the novel as a struggle between the exigencies of structure and the liberating potentiality of texture:

What Edge wants is rule by structure and the consequent attenuation of the autonomy of texture. The reader also, preconditioned by his instinct for order and his long literary experience of expectancy satisfied, desires the rule of structure, though presumably to a degree less Procrustean than Edge. Both earnestly desire the return of Mary which alone would render the eventuality of her departure susceptible to inclusion within a structural framework. And both desire that the dance shall be held.¹⁰

The dance is held, but Mary does not return, and voices, which cannot be distinguished from the calls of birds, speak her name over and over as Rock goes home to rest. She and the other girls escape the human structure, narrative and political, of the novel, the institute as it were, and they inhabit an unintelligible dimension of texture and poetry. They escape the strictures that Edge would impose on them, and they escape Rock as well, for order is surely part of his defining ethic as a precondition of civilization, tranquillity, intellect, and self-confidence.

Yet there are two kinds of order, and here the fundamental

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opposition of the novel appears. Human order is willful and tenuous; nature's order is unmediated and absolute. We fool ourselves by conflating the two, Green says, for while we can impose meanings upon nature, such impositions cannot alter the fabric of nature but only our perception of it, while the changes that nature imposes on us are organic and irrevocable. Green illustrates his point in the description of a fallen beech tree:

A great beech had fallen a night or two earlier, in full leaf, lay now with its green leaves turned to pale gold, as though by the sea. It had brought more vast limbs down along with it, so, in the bright morning, at the thickest of the wood, colourless sky was suddenly opened to Elizabeth and Sebastian above a cliff of green. The wreckage beneath standing beeches was lit at this place by a flare of sunlight concerted on flat, dying leaves which hung on to life by what was broken off, the small branches joining those larger that met the arms, which in their turn grew from the fallen column of the beech, all now an expiring gold of faded green. A world through which the young man and his girl had been meandering, in dreaming shade through which sticks of sunlight slanted to spill upon the ground, had at this point been struck to a blaze, and where their way had been dim, on a sea bed past grave trunks, was now this dying, brilliant mass which lay exposed, a hidden world of spiders working on its gold, the webs these made a field of wheels and spokes of wet silver. The sudden sunlight on Elizabeth and Sebastian as, arms about one another's waists, they halted to wonder and surmise, was a load, a great cloak to clothe them, like a depth of warm water that turned the man's brown city outfit to a drowned man's clothes, the sun was so heavy, so encompassing betimes. (pp. 54–55)

Associated with shipwreck and voyage, wheels of gold and silver, the beech signifies a journey that ends with drowning. This is its human freight, and in this regard its end is final. As a tree, however, it has lived through its cycle, one that is a good deal longer than a human cycle, and the destruction of the individual tree is a neutral event that inspires the wheels of the spiderwebs to shine in the tide of light.¹¹

Rock may represent a dying culture, but he does not die in the eighteen hours the novel covers, and he is highly skilled at contending with the authorities in spite of his weak eyesight and deafness. John Russell, in *Henry Green: Nine Novels and an Unpacked Bag*, points to the last scene between the old scientist and Edge as an example of Rock's intuitive and intellectual superiority. Rock bests the nicotine-intoxicated headmistress just when Edge figures she has clinched her case that he is

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a dirty old man and so ought to be expelled from the cottage she covets. But Rock outwits her, preempts her chair at her desk, and before she knows what is happening she proposes marriage, and then accidentally sets the "State Kidderminster" rug on fire with her cigarette. Rock has momentarily "vanquished" Edge, as Russell puts it,¹² and at least for the day the stalemate between them has been preserved. However, when Rock turns and glorifies his name by saying "Petra" to the mansion, he is at once heroic and insignificant, because "while Rock has been summoning ethical reserves, *Concluding* has insinuated, through structure and imagery, that man has undone himself and nature; that, having thrown nature's forces into imbalance, he has unwittingly brought her darkness upon himself."¹³ Russell is right that humanity has undone itself, but it has not and cannot undo nature. In *Concluding*, nature's domain is a temporal and spatial exterior that imagination can only guess at, for the moribund self is thoroughly imbued with old ways of seeing and acting.

In the future state of *Concluding*, sentiment and cunning are fading, for Rock and Edge belong to the old order. So too does the double tradition of individuality and wealth, which built the mansion, and its successors, politics and taxes, which took over the house and turned it into a school that persistently fails to shape the minds of 300 young women. Physically mature, they remain innocent and childishly sexual. They rise from the sea-wrecked beech, and their sign is the moon, lighting the way through the night in which the world will be washed of the contributions of intellect as well as all the horrors and wrong-turnings of history. They may, in fact, wake in the woods after the night carries off Rock and the megastate dies of inanition, and in them the primeval relationship with nature that is anterior to language will be restored. Thus, they express a kind of cosmic optimism, though their prospect to Rock is the sleep of reason and to Edge the end of the great organizational endeavor of totalitarianism.

The potentiality the young women embody is wholly female. Besides the aging Mr. Rock, the only male characters in the novel are the peculiar groundskeeper, Adams, and the teachers Birt and Dakers, as ineffectual a pair as ever lived, and Green makes clear that the "guv'nor" Miss Edge ought to be considered a masculinized creature. They are the sum of the male principle to which Green opposes the 300 blossoming young women. In spite of the strictures of the institute, they flourish, enacting ceremonies of innocence so spontaneous that they appear to be primordial forms of ritual for which names and clear purposes have yet to be invented. For these young women, conscious-

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ness is a kind of impoverishment, for their unconscious life is rich and assuasive, independent of the authority and decadence of the current state. As the night of the party comes on, the "shadows . . . on the creep toward the mansion" do not threaten them. Indeed, night is their element:

Beech trees were pointing fingers out along the quiet ground. Day was committed to night; the sequence here is light then darkness, and what had been begun in this community under the glare of morning, is yet to be concealed in a sharp fresh of moonlight, a statuary of day after sunset, to be lost, at last, when the usual cloud drifts over the full moon. (p. 109)

An undifferentiated legion of youthful and female power, their names all begin with the murmurous "M," and, often referred to as 300 pairs of eyes or feet, they adopt the moon as their sign. Their uniform whiteness replicates the moonlight in the park, and like it they isolate as doomed those older characters of the novel who dress in black.

Rock's sight is failing, and the moon is little help as he stumbles up to the mansion and later as he goes home. It fails to show him rough spots in the way, or to pick out Sebastian, who frightens the old man by rising short and dark without warning, and who then gives offense by suggesting that the old man skulk around back and sneak into the dance to which he has not been formally invited. But Rock's dignity requires that the old forms not be completely abandoned, and Elizabeth, "resigned to disaster," shows him to the front door:

They turned, and at once became aware of the new powered moon, infinitely more than electric light which, up till then, had seemed, by soft reflection from whence it cut into the Terrace, pallidly to surprise by stealth these mansion walls. For their moon was still enormous above a couch of velvet, blatant, a huge female disc of chalk on deep blue with holes around that, winking, squandered into the void a small light as of latrines. The moon was now all powerful, it covered everything with salt, and bewigged distant trees; it coldly flicked the dark to an instantaneous view of what this held, it stunned the eye by stone, was all powerful, and made each of these three related people into someone alien, glistening, frozen eyed, alone. (p. 189)

Here the moon is at its most powerful moment, marking the end of one phase and the start of the next, ready to begin its rotation into the dark phase. At this point it diminishes stars to the insignificance of latrine lamps, and exerts its greatest pull on the tides, the salt sea that drowns, transfigures, and is the giver of all life. As trope, then, it is also at its strongest moment, marking the seasons and cycles of harvest and

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creation, and so the light it casts on the effete survivors of the old phase reveals them at their weakest and most static.

At morning as the novel opened the young women were similarly alienated but by the light of the sun. When Mr. Rock went up to the main house to beg his breakfast and get swill for his pig, he saw Maggie Blain in the dim kitchen "by reason of a great shaft of early sunlight which, as it entered one of the windows, shone so loud already that it bisected the kitchen, to show him air on the rise in its dust, like soda water through transparent milk." This wall of light separates Rock from the other young women who are lining up to get their food, and he sees them as if underwater, for "they were no more to him than light blue shadows, and their low voices, to his deafness, just a female murmuring, a susurration of feathers" (p. 21). They live in a medium not his own, and shortly later images of dream, tide, and promise which accompany the young women through the novel surface with emphatic clarity:

And all the while a line of girls fetched their breakfasts, served themselves, the sleep from which they had just come a rosy moss upon their lips, the heavy tide of dreams on each in a flow of her eighteen summers, and which would ebb now only with their first cup they were fetching, as his tea made his old blood run again, in this morning's second miracle for Mr. Rock. (p. 22)

As Carey Wall notes,¹⁴ the first miracle for Rock was to have wakened at all, to have survived another night as the young women must now survive the day leading up to their dance. The opposition of their natures—or air against water, day against night, old against young, male against female, and wisdom against vital innocence—Rock understands instinctively and they, in their guilelessness, do not. Consequently, that night when they take him down into the cellar and kiss him, trying to initiate him as a member of their coven, he is scandalized and senses the irreconcilable contradiction between him and them. But if Rock represents the best of an old order, in rejecting their invitation he assures the radical newness of the next cycle. In a sense, he has the wisdom to die and allow youth to invent the new ceremonies of their epoch. He also knows that he must renounce his claim to authority and cut short their attraction to him, and so he goes to the cellar a second time, even though his first trip with Moira had put him at great risk of loss of dignity and sinecure.

The sun is masculine, and as Rock's sign it is empirical, for rather than create and sustain mystery it dissolves it by relentless illumination, and mystery only begins to return as the day wanes and the young women wake from their naps and make preparations for the evening.

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Night may be their time, but white is their color; the sea that drowns others is their natural element. In short, they are essentially paradoxical and inscrutable, and so it is impossible for them to say where Mary has gone, for indeed Mary has escaped from the terrain on which language has coherent explanatory force. The tide in the novel's argument is to urge readers to accept the idea that the world of symbolic and spiritual meaning is not only independent of civilization, but, fortunately, may also be safe from it. In *Concluding*, mystical and natural tropes are independent of man and manhood; they are hostile to aged forms of symbolism, those which, if they are to be understood, require intellect and knowledge of tradition such as Rock embodies and Edge laconically eulogizes. They are also the independent and portentous signs of the sea, the moon, and the young women who will carry an ineffable human principle through the darkness and into a new millennium.

Structure and history are the ironic metaphors for decadence in a novel which proposes that the surest sign of decadence is an obsessive (and authoritarian) desire for structure and history. Of the two kinds of order, the fundamental opposition of *Concluding*, one draws its power and gestures from empiricism, masculinity, and political authority; the other, nature's order, is self-sufficient, object and essence at once, and as inexplicable as the moon that changes darkness into luminous seawater (p. 189). Death and the sea change that grows imminent are changes that nature may impose on us. They are antipathetic to civilization, and the more civilization tries to dominate them, the more comic it becomes, for in our struggle to categorize and explain we cannot comprehend the epistemology of night because civilized seekers cannot guess what symbolic knowledge their search for order has destroyed.

Thus, *Concluding* documents one of the last days of a cycle of signification that began in ancient Greece and Palestine. Green proposes that empiricism, mythology, and religion are evaporating like ether, but the 300 young women of the institute continue to body forth sexual and spiritual impulses that the best efforts of the authoritarian state cannot eradicate. It is they who rise from the sea-wrecked "beech" (pp. 54–55), and whose sign is the moon that lights the way through the night in which all will be washed of intellect and history, with all the wrong-turnings and horrors they imply, and the young and female survivors will reassert the primeval relation of humanity to natural symbols. In other words, Green's personal pessimism is matched by a cosmic optimism revealed in symbols expressive of obscurity and ineffability. In *Concluding*, symbols progress, they gain and grow freer,

more redemptive, the further they get from their entanglement with human affairs and the self-serving motives of civilization and its errant signs.

The author wishes to express his gratitude to Frederick Warner and A. Kingsley Weatherhead, two of Green's most perceptive readers, for their valuable and generous comments on early drafts of this essay.

¹ Henry Green, *Concluding* (London: Hogarth, 1949). All page references to the novel are cited parenthetically in the text.

² Eudora Welty, "Henry Green: A Novelist of the Imagination," *Texas Quarterly*, 4 (1981), 248.

³ See, for example, interviews Green held in later life with Alan Ross, "Green, with Envy: Critical Reflections and an Interview," *London Magazine*, 6 (1959), 18–24, and David Lambourne, "No Thundering Horses: The Novels of Henry Green," *Shenandoah*, 26 (1975), 57–71.

⁴ Rod Mengham notes this change in discussing the typescript manuscript in the British Library in *The Idiom of the Time: The Writing of Henry Green* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982), p. 201.

⁵ George Orwell, 1984 (San Diego, Calif.: Harcourt, 1977). See also Rod Mengham's comments on Orwell in *The Idiom of the Time*, pp. 182–84, and Michael North's similar comments on 1984 in *Henry Green and the Writing of His Generation* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1984), p. 167, *passim*.

⁶ In *Henry Green*, Columbia Essays on Modern Writers, No. 29 (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1967), Robert Ryf calls *Concluding* "in some ways the most unresolved of [Green's] novels" (p. 33). In *Nine Novels and an Unpacked Bag* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1960), John Russell remarks the irony of the novel's title, arguing that "in fact, there is no pathos in *Concluding*—principally because nothing is concluded" (p. 182), though by contrast he finds "that in *Concluding* Green may have reached a philosophically conclusive position" (p. 197), suggesting that the novel moves Rock and his sympathetic readers beyond a craving for closure to an acceptance of the open-endedness of last things. But would Rock want this? Michael North, in *Henry Green and the Writing of His Generation*, describes Rock as someone who "rejects the public world of Miss Edge, not because it is more abstract than his own or somehow false, but because his own fictions are incomparably more complete" (p. 193). Thus, by not opening letters and by subverting the petty tyrannies of the managerial society, Rock can maintain the fiction that completion is possible. Finally, *Concluding* appears to be a novel about an end to a major cycle and the initiation of another that cannot be formulated in the language and symbols of the past but that is nonetheless real.

⁷ Carey Wall is an exception in "Henry Green's Enchantments: Passage and the Renewal of Life," *Twentieth Century Literature*, 29 (1983), 430–46. Wall holds that in Green's work "symbols constitute a saving knowledge" while "the perfectly ordinary, solid things of this world . . . become hierophanies speaking of life's power and renewal" (p. 431). The equation tends to suggest that hope is as large as the human capacity to grasp symbols.

⁸ The symbols of sea change and the spiral suggest two possible allusions.

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Green, who in his use of classical unities, and also in the allusive Homeric subtext of *Party Going*, revealed a close acquaintance with classical literature, may well have in mind the waters of forgetfulness, or the river Styx, which eliminates all memory of previous existence as the soul passes into a new life, though here it is not the individual but all civilization that will be cleansed of historical consciousness. Also, the spiral in particular, as well as the general treatment of historical epochs, suggests that Green had Yeats's theory of history in mind, perhaps as outlined in *A Vision*, and certainly in the "widening gyre" of the falcon in "A Second Coming," here ironized as the diminishing gyre of a flock of blackbirds. Originally published in 1925, *A Vision* was revised in 1937 (New York: Macmillan, 1938).

⁹ A. Kingsley Weatherhead, "Structure and Texture in Henry Green's Latest Novels," *Accent*, 19 (1959), 114, 112.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

¹¹ According to Russell (*Nine Novels*), the passage expresses Green's belief that "the sea transforms matter, and in *Concluding* nature has in some way undergone a sea change" (p. 191), and consequently Russell calls the passage "perhaps the richest in all of Green's prose" (p. 192). Rod Mengham, comparing the typescript in the British Library with the published version, discovered that images of the sea—wreckage, drowning, tide, seaweed, and so forth—were added by Green very deliberately before the manuscript was printed (*The Idiom of the Time*, pp. 200–01).

¹² Russell, *Nine Novels*, p. 184.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

¹⁴ Wall, "Henry Green's Enchantments," p. 445.

“Violent Families”: *A Whistle in the Dark* and *The Homecoming*

BERNARD F. DUKORE

In September 1961, Tom Murphy's play *A Whistle in the Dark* opened at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East, London. The following month, it transferred to the West End. In June 1965, the Royal Shakespeare Company produced Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming* at its then-home in the West End, the Aldwych Theatre. In July 1989, the Abbey Theatre's 1986 revival of *A Whistle in the Dark* opened at the Royal Court Theatre, London. According to Fintan O'Toole's preface to a collection of Murphy's plays, including this work, published to coincide with the Royal Court performances, “Harold Pinter . . . used it as a direct model for *The Homecoming*.¹ So it would seem. So, indeed, it did seem to several friends and colleagues who recommended that I see the Royal Court production, as it also did to me when I saw it. Reinforcing this impression was the cast list of the 1961 production, printed in the Royal Court's program and in the published edition of the play, since the first cast included the late Patrick Magee, who was a friend of Pinter's.²

However, as Aesop points out in his fable about the wolf in sheep's clothing, appearances are often deceiving. In the case of these plays, what look like influences may be affinities. When I put the question to Harold Pinter, he replied unambiguously:

I missed *A Whistle in the Dark* when it was at the Royal Court recently—to my regret. I didn't see it in 1961 either. I think the reason for this must be that I was in the United States with *The Caretaker*, on its way to New York, from July until October 1961.

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I imagine that *A Whistle in the Dark*, with my old friend Pat Magee, was done during that period. Whatever, I didn't see it and I have never read it.³

An examination of the chronology of his plays in performance amply bears him out. *The Caretaker* closed in London in May 1961, then opened in New York in October. Very likely, Pinter went directly from the New York production of *The Caretaker* into the casting of and then rehearsals for the London production of *The Collection*, which he codirected with Peter Hall for a February 1962 opening at the Aldwych. "So it seems," Pinter adds in his letter, "that both Tom Murphy and I have written plays about violent families."

Although *A Whistle in the Dark* did not influence *The Homecoming*, their substantial affinities nevertheless illuminate the nature of each work. One of the strongest impressions created by both plays is violence. Both revolve around families which, on the stage, are with one exception all male, and the exception is the same in both: the wife of the oldest son, who has emigrated from his native country (Ireland in Murphy's play, England in Pinter's) to work in another (England in Murphy's play, America in Pinter's). Whereas this son's wife was born in the new country in Murphy's play, she was born in the native country in Pinter's. Whereas the father's wife is dead in Pinter's play, which takes place in the family's native country, she is alive in Murphy's, which unlike Pinter's play is set in the new one. Thus, while the Irish mother, like her English counterpart, is a dramatic presence, she is physically absent from the stage. In contrast to *The Homecoming*, in which only the oldest son has emigrated, all the men of the family in *A Whistle in the Dark* have left their country, either to reside permanently in the new one or else to visit. In each play, an older, but not the oldest, brother is a pimp. Each play has a male character who is not a member of the older son's paternal nuclear family—in *The Homecoming*, Sam, the father's brother; in *A Whistle in the Dark*, Mush, a friend of and hanger-on to the younger sons—and in each play that character reinforces the greater strength of those to whom he is attached.⁴

Verbal and physical violence dominates both plays as characters contend for positions of power within the family—but in Murphy's play outside it as well. In *The Homecoming*, characters savagely mock each other from the outset; Lenny tells stories of beating women; his father, Max, who brags of the fear his strength and fighting prowess used to inspire, threatens to hit Lenny with his walking stick and warns him, "I'll chop your spine off" (*H*, p. 25); Max advises his son Joey, who is a boxer, how to improve his skills in the ring; later, he strikes Joey in the

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stomach and hits his brother Sam on the head with his stick. Bending over the body, Lenny declares that Sam is not dead. "He's not even dead!" Max derisively exclaims, as if inability to die signified impotence (*H*, p. 94). "Nothing's changed. Still the same," says Teddy, the oldest son, when he and Ruth return to his paternal family's home (*H*, p. 38). While he refers to the physical properties of the room, his words resonate the family's relationships, attitudes, and values, as well as the violence these engender.

The unchanging nature of the characters and of the violence that is part of the way of life among the male members of the family is more explicit in *A Whistle in the Dark*. When Michael, the oldest of the Carney sons, tries to dissuade his father and brothers from letting the youngest of them, Des, fight the Mulryan family, Dada taunts him for cowardice: "There's no change in you." Savagely emphasizing his position as powerful and fear-inspiring head of the clan, a position that Michael would usurp if his brothers were to accept his views, Dada lashes the table with his belt—an action that, in the theater, conveys a highly charged shock and that provides an emotionally powerful curtain for Act I. Rallying to their father, Iggy and Hugo stand supportively on either side of him. Defeated and dejected, Michael leaves. "Hah-haaaa!" exclaims Dada, "I showed him. He never changed a bit. Like old times! (*He throws his arms around HUGO and IGGY.*)" (*WD*, pp. 40–42). Nor, by implication, have they changed.

Fighting, which is a major aspect of the unchanging brutality of their mode of living, also seems to be the Carney men's major topic of conversation. "He's got big, big bones, loose, he'll be a hard hitter," says Harry of young Des, giving him what he considers a great compliment, and he adds proudly, "Half an hour over and young Des has a scrap already. . . . One scrap already and tucks more on the way" (*WD*, p. 20–21). Later, when Des describes his fight, Dada and his brothers advise him how to improve his skills—not in the ring, as the youngest son in *The Homecoming* supposedly would use them, but in a bar-room fracas. Dada counsels him to keep his back to the wall for protection; Iggy to hit hard; Harry to use a bottle, which "is better than a fist. A broken bottle is better than two fists"; Hugo to utilize "a chain or a rasp or a belt or a chair" (*WD*, p. 34). "I'll fight anyone that wants to, that don't want to!" boasts Harry. "I'm not afraid of nobody!" (*WD*, p. 54). Des is proud of the family's reputation for fighting: "a lot of people at home talk about Iggy—and ye all—with a sort of respect. . . . Even outside the town, they're, well—kind of afraid of the name Carney" (*WD*, p. 51).

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Harry is particularly happy that his father and youngest brother have arrived, because now his family, from which he conspicuously excludes Michael, can have a decisive fight, which seems part of an ongoing war, with a rival clan:

HARRY: . . . The Mulryans was doing a lot of braggin' about what they'd do to us, so we sent them word we was claimin' them. Carneys versus Mulryans. All the Carneys: me, Iggy, Dada, Hugo and Des. Des'll be good. Five of us, seven of them.

MICHAEL: You're crazy. Do you know what you're doing this time? You know the kind they are, how they fight.

HARRY: You know how I fight. We're all iron men. Not just Iggy. Ask Dada. Fight all night, Michael. Anyone. (*Holds up his fist.*) Iron, look. Aw, but look, more iron. (*Withdraws from his pocket an ass-shoe which he wears as a knuckle duster. He gives MICHAEL a tap on the shoulder with it.*) A souvenir from Ireland. Iron, man. Let no one say there was ever a jibber in our family! Or was there? Hah? Not even one? Was there ever a jibber in our family, Michael? (WD, p. 28)

Between Acts II and III, Harry, Iggy, Hugo, and Des Carney, without their father but with their friend Mush, and with Iggy using a chain as a weapon, successfully engage the Mulryans in battle.

Upon Michael's return to his home in Act III, he is in anguish—partly for his failure to stand by his family and partly for fear that his refusal to fight derives from cowardice, not from principles. His father and brothers turn on him. After they verbally castigate him for cowardice, Harry punches him in the stomach. Orally, Michael tries to destroy Dada's value system:

DADA: Thank God, boys, I could always stand up and—

MICHAEL: Hit, belt, clout—

DADA: Yes!

MICHAEL: Children! Hit kids!

He reminds both Dada and his brothers that when they were children Dada would return home "In a temper, sulking, after his conversations with the big-shot friends. 'We'll get them!' . . . Pulling four little kids out of bed, two, three, four in the morning. And up on a chair. 'World Champ Carney! Ah-haa for the Carneys! We'll get them! Charge!' And we all belted into one another." To his dismay, none of them sees anything wrong with such actions. Rather, they concur with Dada's boast that he "Made men of ye!" Nor does any of his brothers support Michael when he points out to Dada that while he smoked and drank with the big shots who were supposedly his friends, "your wife [was] on her knees scrubbing their floors" (WD, pp. 92–94). Instead, all goad

him and Des to fight. After Des hits Michael several times, Michael gives Des a fatal blow on the head with a bottle—which, ironically, is the weapon Harry urged Des to use when fighting. For the sons of this family, only violence might provide the perception that the way of life Dada instilled in them is self-destructive, and this unanticipated, extreme act of brutality does so. While Dada stammers, “I had nothing to do with—Not my fault . . . No, listen boys. Him! Michael. Look at him,” Harry turns from Dada and joins Michael over their brother’s body, then Iggy and Hugo do the same. “DADA is isolated in a corner of the stage,” mumbling, as the play ends, that he tried his best to raise his sons properly (*WD*, p. 97). This stage picture contrasts strikingly with that of the brothers’ former rejection of Michael in favor of their father, when as mentioned earlier they grouped themselves around the latter.

In both *A Whistle in the Dark* and *The Homecoming*, violence is pervasive, but in the former play, which stands in the tradition of urban naturalism, it is more extreme, and it is more explicitly a social condition—partly a consequence of paternal upbringing, partly a consequence of class relationships outside the home. Such naturalistic extremity and clarity, which are among the dramatic characteristics of Murphy’s powerful drama, highlight the different dramatic characteristics, minimalization and allusiveness, of Pinter’s overwhelming play. The potential for extreme violence is also a heavy factor in the theatrical world Pinter creates, where, Murphy’s work helps to reveal, it is also socially conditioned both within and without the family structure. His wife, Max tells Ruth, taught his sons “all the morality they know. . . . Every single bit of the moral code they live by—was taught to them by their mother” (*H*, p. 62). As evidenced by his behavior during the course of the play, Max taught them at least as much, if only by example. Just as Pinter depicts the societal structure within his violent family less graphically than Murphy portrays it, so does he paint the society outside it in less detailed a manner than Murphy does. Yet Pinter suggests it, for example: according to Max, in a boast that recalls those of the Carneys, he and his friend MacGregor “were two of the worst hated men in West End of London. . . . We’d walk into a place, the whole room’d stand up, they’d make way to let us pass” (*H*, p. 24).

In *The Homecoming*, Teddy, who teaches philosophy in America, is the intellectual of the family. He has waited six years to reveal to his father and brothers that he is married and has three sons. A devious man, he brings his wife Ruth to his parental home on a surprise visit, telling her that his relatives are “very warm people” who are “not ogres” (*H*, pp. 38–39), which may be at best misleading (they are heated in

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their hostilities, not in displays of affection, as the first phrase suggests), at worst a deliberate lie (they are more ogres than not ogres). Neither he nor she reveals why he brings her there, though one may infer that by doing so he creates a situation that might result in her deciding not to return to America with him. Particularly important, Teddy is not a victim, as Michael is. Rather, he refuses to permit himself to crack under the pressures exerted upon him by his wife, brothers, and father, and he holds his own, perhaps more than his own, with these violent and calculating characters. When it becomes clear that Ruth will remain in England (though less clear that she will stay with his father's family, still less clear that she will do so on their terms), he calculatedly bids the men good-bye but says nothing to her, and when she invites him, in a slatternly taunt, not to be a stranger after he departs, he deliberately does not take the bait but instead leaves without responding to her, which one may interpret as derisive.

Teddy has been away from England for six years, Michael away from Ireland for over ten years.⁵ Michael is an intellectual manqué, and as his weakness helps to illuminate Teddy's strength, so Teddy's strength helps to illuminate Michael's weakness. Whereas Teddy teaches at a university in America, Michael, who has had more education than his brothers, no longer even reads books. In fact, there are no books of any kind in his home. In contrast to Teddy, Michael feels responsible for his brothers, whom he allows to live in his and his wife Betty's house: "They never got a chance. They'll change" (*WD*, p. 19). In particular, he feels responsible for his youngest brother Des, and he tries to persuade his father, brothers, and Des himself that the best course of action for Des is to return to Ireland as soon as possible and attend the local polytechnic school that would prepare him for a good job, not to remain and become involved in the brawls that are the chief components of the lives of the Carney brothers. Michael fails to persuade anyone. Had he the perceptiveness about his family that Teddy has about his own, he would recognize, as Betty pleads with him to do, that not only are they, including Des, incapable of seizing the opportunities he would have them grasp, let alone make the change in themselves that he would have them create, but that the only chance he himself has of escaping their influence or the consequences of their actions is to cut himself off from them completely, as Teddy has done.

In contrast to Teddy, Michael is, as Dada and his brothers know, incapable of withstanding the pressures they exert on him. "You can talk a bit, but you can't act," Dada tells him. "Actions speak louder than words. The man of words fails the man of action. Or maybe you have

changed, got brave? Maybe you'll act?" (*WD*, p. 41). As Dada expects, Michael does nothing. Whereas Teddy defines himself by his actions, Michael's inability to act enables others to define him. "I can't get out of all this," he tries to explain to Betty. "I could have had a good job. I could have been well fixed. I could have *run* years ago. Away from them. I could have been a teacher" (*WD*, p. 67). Only the first sentence in this quotation is true. Michael cannot do any of these things. What he does not perceive is that he never could have achieved what he claims he might have been able to accomplish. Had he the ability to achieve these goals, he would have done so, but he was always incapable of acting on his beliefs. Thus, "could have" combines with "if" to reveal a life that consists of regrets for what might have been: "If I had," "If I could have got away from ye," "If I had got away from things like ye!" (*WD*, pp. 86–87). Lacking the capacity to define himself, as Teddy does, Michael is defined by others. Is his refusal to fight a consequence of his cowardice or of abiding by principles of nonviolence? Not he but his paternal family provides the answer, cowardice, which is a taint, not a virtue. Thus, their collective will makes him try to remove the taint by fighting his youngest brother. Ironically, it is only when Michael finally acts by fighting that his brothers recognize him as head of the family and turn against their father. But Michael's action, killing his brother in combat, is a denial of what he professes himself to be, a rejection of what he claims are his principles, and an embrace of values he insists he abhors. Unlike Teddy, he is a victim, trapped by the very forces he hopes to escape. When he is physically strongest, he is morally and emotionally weakest.

Dada's actual name is "Michael Carney Senior" (*WD*, p. 45). As this play's action and dialogue reveal, Dada, like the son who is named for him, is a talker, not a man of action, except within his marital family, where he is a bully. Dada bullies his wife; so Michael does his own. Like Michael, Dada is a coward, and like his oldest son he runs away from fights. When the chips are down, Dada fails to join his sons in the combat, which he had aggressively supported, against the Mulryans. Underscoring his similarity with Michael, his earlier jeers at Michael reverberate upon himself: his inaction speaks louder than his words, the man of words has failed the man of action, and he has not changed by becoming brave.

As with Dada and Michael, there are resemblances between Max and his oldest son. As Max's wife betrays Max, Teddy's wife betrays Teddy. Like Max, Teddy has three sons. Furthermore, each man, the dialogue insinuates, may not be the father of these sons: near the end of

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Act I Max asks Teddy whether he is their natural father; soon after the start of Act II he calls his own children "three bastard sons" (*H*, pp. 59, 63). Although the first suggestion may merely be a type of ritualistic macho ridicule and the second a derisive figure of speech, they may also hint at the truth. However decrepit age may have made Max, his affinities with his oldest son suggest that he has power. Unlike Dada, who does not strike anyone during the course of Murphy's play, Max is the only character in Pinter's who does so onstage, thereby emphasizing his destructive force.

The solitary female characters in these plays vividly contrast with each other. The titular homecoming of Pinter's play may apply to Ruth as well as to Teddy. Ruth, who "was born quite near here" (*H*, p. 69), reveals by her actions that she is accustomed to the ways the men of her husband's paternal family interact with her and with each other. Apparently, she is aware that Teddy is devious, for by not replying to his description of his family as warm non-ogres, she seems alert to the linguistic stratagems he employs when he takes her into his father's house. Her initial encounter with Lenny, which is a struggle for domination between them, demonstrates her proficiencies. Not only is he unable to ruffle her by disrespectful, derisive, and vicious mockery, it is she who insults, bullies, and demeans him to the point of losing control of himself. Nor does Max disturb her composure when he calls her a tart, slut, scrubber, whore, slopbucket, bedpan, and disease. When the family proposes that she remain as a prostitute for Lenny and service them as well, she calmly negotiates terms, to which Lenny, who is a professional pimp, agrees—a suggestion that she may have the upper hand. At the end of the play, she sits as if enthroned: Max is on his knees before her; Joey's head is in her lap; Lenny stands mute, watching perhaps in obedience; and Teddy, who may be an encumbrance, is gone.

Betty lacks Ruth's ability to cope successfully with her husband's family. As Betty discloses soon after the start of the play, her husband's brothers treat her in a manner similar to the way Teddy's brothers treat Ruth.

BETTY: Who will make the bid to sleep with me tonight?

MICHAEL: Don't make a big thing out of it. Harry was drunk that night.

BETTY: Harry is drunk tonight, the others are drunk, they're always drunk. (*WD*, p. 18)

Whereas Ruth remains calm and retains her control when her brothers-in-law make sexual advances toward her (she ensures that

Joey, who accompanies her upstairs, does not go "all the way" [H, p. 82]), Betty is so apprehensive that she seeks her husband's assistance to prevent another recurrence of attempts by her brothers-in-law to make her their whore.

In contrast to Ruth, Betty repeatedly tries to salvage her marriage. "Which comes first, which is more important to you, me or your brothers? . . . It's us or them" (WD, p. 19). Harry, of whom Lenny is the equivalent, verbally as well as physically reviles her. When she interrupts Harry's conversation with her husband to tell Michael what he should know, Harry maliciously taunts her: "Aaaa, Betty Batter bought a pound of butter! Sly little Betty does be earwiggin' at keyholes" and "There was an old woman called Betty. You know that one? . . . There was an old women called Betty, she slipped off the back of the sette; the sette it broke—" (WD, p. 27). When she tells Harry that he and Michael's other brothers should "start looking for new digs," he becomes more openly insulting: "Now, Bitchev, how would you like to keep your English mouth out of it, and let the *man* of the house talk?" Without further ado, he ignores her and resumes speaking to Michael. When she reiterates her demand, he remains offensive, and her husband refuses to back her up.

BETTY: You'll just have to get out, that's all.

HARRY: Look, why don't you go back to the skivvying in there? (*Men's voices off.*)

BETTY: You don't talk to me like that.

MICHAEL: Take it easy. (WD, pp. 28-29)

Later in the play, Dada, in her presence, comments on another outburst she makes: "Who's talking? The woman? The stranger?" (WD, p. 85)—which is not as vicious as Max's epithets to Ruth but is crushing nonetheless.

Unlike Ruth and Teddy, Betty and Michael have an open domestic tiff, which fortifies the suggestion implicit in *The Homecoming* that its married couple have gone beyond the point of overt squabbles to that of no return, where instead of taking the trouble to bicker, bickering seems a waste of time; instead, there may be an unspoken acknowledgement that husband and wife are at such familiarly extreme cross-purposes that one more cause of tension can only result in disruption. At first, Betty amiably tries to arouse in her husband a knee-jerk display of jealousy, which would translate into comfortable affection, but by failing to accomplish her goal, a minor discord becomes a stepping-stone to a major altercation. When she asks him what he thinks of her going off for the night with Des, he replies, "(absently). Yeh." Next

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attempting flattery to arouse his interest, she asks Des whether he would like to be as handsome as his brother. When Des laughingly replies in the affirmative, Michael “irritably” chimes in: “Then you could get a pretty little woman like me: English.” Making yet another effort not to be put off by his comment, which like his previous response demeans her in front of his brother, Betty proposes to introduce Des to a pretty girl in the neighborhood, whereupon Michael interrupts: “(angrily). Why are you always trying to organize other people? Do you think they don’t know how to organize their own lives? What business is it of yours? (*Realizes he is being unfair; he tries to pass it off.*) Des is in no hurry with the birds, are you? Don’t be in any hurry to go to the altar. See what happened to me.” Des’s adoption of his brother’s type of humor, which creates an alliance against Betty, makes her drop her attempts to be amiable. He might marry, says Des, in about fifteen years. “Oh no,” she responds, “you’ll be too old then, you’ll be past it, like your brother.” By way of telling Des, she tells Michael, “My advice to you is don’t get married at all. Honestly, Irishmen shouldn’t,” and she leaves the room (*WD*, pp. 47–48).

Later, after Harry continues to abuse her by calling her “English Polly, or whatever your name is” (*WD*, p. 64), she pleads with Michael that if his family will not leave her and his home, then they themselves should do so. He refuses and almost goads her into calling him a coward. Although that word remains unspoken, they know what it is. Both desperate, she cries and he leaves the house. When he returns in the third act to confront his paternal family, she tries to interrupt, demanding that his father and brothers leave her home. Not only do they reject her, so does her husband: “Keep out of it. . . . Go upstairs” (*WD*, p. 85). She does so, but when she returns she carries her suitcase and gives Michael an ultimatum: “Are you coming with me or are you staying with them?” He is “bewildered, looking almost stupidly at her. He looks at DES.” Upon Betty’s demand that he look at her instead and her insistence that he must make the decision now, Des, conforming to the way the others address her, calls her the worst name Harry had used, “Bitchey.” As her husband says not a word, she promptly leaves. “HARRY, DADA, IGGY, and HUGO follow her to the front door to cheer her departure,” while Des cries out, “Bitchey! Polly! English trash! Whore!” (*WD*, pp. 94–95).

In contrast to Betty, who again and again attempts to salvage her marriage and to make her husband choose his marital family over his paternal family, Ruth only once makes an effort to have Teddy choose between his marital and paternal families, and she does so before she

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has met his father and brothers. Not long after they enter the house, she asks whether he wants to stay. "Stay?" he repeats, then adds, "We've come to stay. We're bound to stay . . . for a few days." Perhaps hesitantly, perhaps choosing her words carefully, Ruth provides one reason for leaving: "I think . . . the children . . . might be missing us." "Don't be silly," states Teddy. "They might," is all Ruth says in response. Teddy ends the conversation with a rhetorical question: "Look, we'll be back in a few days, won't we?" (*H*, p. 37–38). After she meets her in-laws, Ruth does not raise the subject again. Partly because she does not do so, whereas Betty frequently presses Michael to reject his paternal family in favor of his marital one, Ruth's refusal to mention this topic to Teddy suggests that their relationship is virtually, if not actually, unsalvageable.

Near the end of the play, it is Teddy who offers Ruth a choice, but the type of presentation he chooses to make is so cold-blooded that he practically invites her to reject the alternative of remaining:

Ruth . . . the family have invited you to stay, for a while longer. As a . . . as a kind of guest. If you like the idea I don't mind. We can manage very easily at home . . . until you come back. . . . But Ruth, I should tell you . . . that you'll have to pull your weight a little, if you stay. Financially. My father isn't very well off. . . . Or you can come home with me. (*H*, pp. 91–92)

At this point, Ruth and Lenny haggle about the terms of her staying. Teddy says nothing else until after Lenny has agreed to her conditions, and Max and Lenny tell her that if she wishes to do so she might cook a bit, make the beds, and clean house. "Keep everyone company" is Teddy's sole, succinct contribution to the dialogue with her, which instead of clarifying her role with his paternal family so as to make her position appear revulsive, harmonizes with the amiable presentation given by the others, a gloss that makes their proposal seem, as Ruth puts it, perhaps for her husband's benefit, "a very attractive idea" (*H*, p. 94). Since, unlike Betty when she is about to go, he makes no real attempt to persuade his spouse to leave, one may infer that he may not particularly want her to join him and that she has no special reason to do so. He does not suggest that either he or their children, whom she had briefly mentioned in Act I as a reason for them to leave, might now be a reason for her to return to America. To the contrary, he had told her that they can manage without her. Perhaps because he offers no reason for her to come home with him, she feels no obligation to clarify her plan of action, much less to state her reason for it, to him or anyone else.

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Perhaps too, her decision at the end of the play is not so much to join her husband's paternal family as it is to leave her own marital one.

Their first productions separated by only four years, *A Whistle in the Dark* and *The Homecoming* (which are, at least partly, about what the authors of the latter aptly calls "violent families") are dynamic works of art. Both their affinities to and their differences from each other illuminate the distinctive nature of each work. The very nature of their violence—in some respects alike, in other respects different—points to each author's methods to achieve theatrical forcefulness. Violence is not all that highlights the special qualities of each play. The characters of both plays, while sharing common status as types, differ significantly from each other. Although such types as the father, the oldest son who is better educated than his brothers, and the oldest son's wife are undeniably important, equally important are the differences within each type and the interaction of the characters, notably the nature of the father's influence on his sons, the way the oldest son and his brothers relate to each other, and the ways the wives of the oldest sons cope with their husbands and brothers-in-law. Each play is a vital work of art that provides an overwhelming experience in the theater. While each is valid and powerful in its own terms, its affinities to the other enhance one's appreciation of both Murphy's and Pinter's dramas.

¹ Tom Murphy, *A Whistle in the Dark and Other Plays* (London: Methuen, 1989), p. x. Quotations from Murphy's plays, cited parenthetically in the text as *WD*, are from this edition.

² Ironically, the role of Michael in *A Whistle in the Dark* was performed in 1961 by Michael Craig, who would play Teddy, Pinter's equivalent character in *The Homecoming*, in the 1967 Broadway production.

³ Letter, Pinter to author, 18 Aug. 1989.

⁴ Since both plays have been published, I will make no effort to summarize their plots for the reader. Quotations from *The Homecoming*, cited parenthetically in the text as *H*, are from Vol. III of Pinter's *Complete Works* (New York: Grove Press, 1978). Because Pinter's play is so well known and Murphy's so little known, I will give far fewer quotations from the former than from the latter.

⁵ In Tom Murphy's *Conversations on a Homecoming* (1985), a young man who emigrates is also named Michael. Although Michael Ridge went to America not England, and although unlike Michael Carney he returns to Ireland, he too was away for ten years, which is long enough to be clear to him, as it is to Michael, that he has been a failure. See Murphy, *After Tragedy* (London: Methuen, 1988), pp. 82–83.

Rituals of Self-Deception: Clarissa Dalloway's Final Moment of Vision

DEBORAH GUTH

One of the most intriguing aspects of Clarissa's final moment of vision, when she withdraws from her party, is the variety of mythico-literary modes she uses to shape her interpretation of Septimus' death. Critical analysis of the novel has dealt with various mythic motifs, with Christian symbolism as well as with Clarissa's vestigial romanticism. What is crucial, however, to an understanding of this scene is Clarissa's highly selective use of each mode, the underlying reason for her shifts between them, and the omissions within each one. While mythic structures and images have often been used in literature to connect individual experience to the archetypal dynamics and meanings contained in myth,¹ their role in Clarissa's moment of inwardness serves a rather different, more deflective purpose.

As I have argued elsewhere,² the private, supposedly "real" inner self that Clarissa explores during the day in fact duplicates rather than denies the artificial, ceremonial quality of her public self. Stylized, romantic images of herself descending the steps at Bourton dressed in white, bowing her head by the hall table in a gesture of devotion,³ cradling her life in her arms and presenting it to her parents by the lake (p. 48); the image of the nun in her cell (pp. 35–36), the martyr standing alone, "a single figure against the appalling night" (p. 35), of herself seeking pinnacles and standing drenched in fire, brandishing torches and flinging life away (p. 185)—all these reveal that, just as she "assembles" her public self for presentation, so her inner world is an ingathering of images and imagined gestures, a pageant of heightened

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self-images in the service not of self-discovery but of imaginative self-invention.

Her use of myth during her final vision fits quite naturally into this pattern. As subjective visionary experience becomes indistinguishable from the fictional self it creates, myth serves both to shape the inner drama of life and death that she plays out and as her most sophisticated internal strategy of self-evasion.

The three prominent frameworks underlying Clarissa's final vision are the romantic, the pagan, and the Christian. The romantic is apparent in the well-known passage where the meaning of Septimus' death is revealed to her:

A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the center which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death.

But this young man who had killed himself—had he plunged holding his treasure? "If it were now to die, 'twere now to be most happy," she had said to herself once, coming down, in white. (p. 204)

Clarissa's vision of death as a sublime state of unity, the triumph of the visionary imagination over destructive time,⁴ and the love-death implicit in the quote from *Othello*—all pertain to this tradition. Similarly, her sense of Septimus' leap as a glorious act of defiance evokes the *non serviam* of the romantic rebel.

Significantly, however, her quasi-mystical interpretation in no way reflects Septimus' own experience, which is characterized neither by a sense of embrace nor by wide-ranging metaphysical considerations, but by terror and an ever-narrowing focus on the prosaic details of his immediate surroundings as he casts around for a means of escape:

Holmes was coming upstairs . . . Holmes would get him. But no; not Holmes; not Bradshaw. Getting up rather unsteadily, hopping indeed from foot to foot, he considered Mrs. Filmer's nice clean bread-knife with "Bread" carved on the handle. Ah, but one musn't spoil that. The gas fire? But it was too late now. Holmes was coming. Razors he might have got, but Rezia . . . had packed them. There remained only the window, the large Bloomsbury lodging-house window; the tiresome, the troublesome, and rather melodramatic business of opening the window and throwing himself out. (p. 165)

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What is more, the pure self which Clarissa feels him to be preserving—"did he plunge holding his treasure?"—is conspicuously absent from his thoughts; he does not actually want to die—"Life was good. The sun hot"—and his final words, "I'll give it you," hurled at the old man opposite, denote neither ecstatic self-affirmation nor, as has sometimes been thought, a bequeathing of his vision.⁵ On the contrary, this ungrammatical phrase—a coarser form of "I'll just show you"—is a cry of contempt and helpless self-derision as he prepares himself to enact the melodrama—the "it" in his phrase—which he knows "they" will enjoy.

Clarissa's interpretation should thus not be attributed to visionary insight or preternatural communication but to her own desire to see Septimus' death in these terms, and her reconstruction serves two purposes. The first is to evade, or "transcend," the shocking immediacy of death—of which, according to Peter Walsh, she has a horror—by transforming it into a purely symbolic gesture. The second is to distance herself from the hollow "celebration of life" her party has revealed itself to be and, by identifying with a romanticized image of Septimus, to defy the world that never seems to live up to her dreams.

This ineffable vision of death, however, carries hidden dangers. As unequivocal affirmation, it constitutes a call for action; as epiphany it precludes a simple return to the world that has been renounced with such grandeur. Clarissa's shift, after a short distancing passage of conjecture ("Suppose he had had that passion . . ." [p. 204]), away from the romantic mode to a pagan configuration constitutes a strategic move away from this call. On one level, the image of the scapegoat, with its attendant fear, serves to intensify her denunciation of society and to dramatize the wanton brutality that underlies civilized appearances. But there is a deeper purpose to this motif: by shifting the locus of control away from Septimus onto society and transforming the romantic hero into hapless victim, she can modify the level of response required from active emulation to a passive, purely internal level—pity—which she can wholeheartedly fulfill. Most significantly, perhaps, the image of the scapegoat offers her a more fluid framework for identification and thus a modified destiny. Indeed, the pagan myth through which she now relates to Septimus as potential to fully realized victim ("She had escaped. But that young man had killed himself" [p. 204]) postulates the substitution of one life for another which the romantic mode precluded.

The pagan schema, however, has no less problematic implications. Caught between a death that has inexplicably passed her by and a life

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she has denounced, Clarissa is left in an existential no-man's-land and needs a symbolic constellation that will both release her from this limbo and give meaning to her reprieve.

The superbly crafted mutation of the pagan scapegoat into the Christological victor provides her with precisely this and perfects the theme of substitution as evasion. Initially evoked in Clarissa's image of Septimus impaled on the rusty spikes of the fence reminiscent of the nails, the Christian model dominates the final part of Clarissa's vision when, eucharistically communing with his spirit as in a Mass, she confesses her sins ("She had schemed; she had pilfered"), feels purified, and assumes the role of *mater dolorosa*, grieving and rejoicing at the death of her son.⁶

This shift from pagan to Christian framework has significant repercussions on Clarissa's own self-image. In the first place, the implicit transformation of Septimus from hapless victim into Christological victor releases her from identification with an image of tragic surrender. But more essentially, insofar as Jesus' death was freely assumed, this model legitimizes the substitution of one life for another without implicating Clarissa, as the pagan model would, in the actual sacrifice. It sanctifies her survival as part of a divine plan and transforms her from guilty beneficiary of another's suffering into the intended object of a conscious act of love.

Psychologically, this schema enables her to unite the conflicting responses—admiration and pity—evoked by the previous modes and frees her from the implications of her previous self-images. As visionary of the romantic love-death, her survival would have spelled betrayal or anticlimax. As denouncer of a barbaric society, she would have been doomed to the wilderness in which, according to Blake, angry prophets roam. As *mater dolorosa*, she can grieve and rejoice at a death which in no way calls on her to follow, and be sanctified in her very passivity.

Other shifts and evasions within Clarissa's vision are equally noteworthy. As critics have pointed out, the internal rhythm of her experience can be seen as a rite of passage, reflecting a cycle of ritual death, a passage through the underworld and rebirth or return to the world of reality.⁷ Yet this pattern serves mainly to reinforce the illusion of illumination and change that Clarissa is enacting for herself. Although she does go back to her party, her identification with the old woman opposite closing the blinds denies the symbolism of return: like her mirror image, she has shut out the external world to bask in the self-reflecting light of vision where self and imagined other can become one while remaining distinct. And while she does experience a sense of

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renewal, this feeling is not connected to the world she returns to, nor does it imply acceptance of it; on the contrary, her joy derives from her visionary alienation from it.

If we look at the structure of ritual celebration and sacrifice of the scapegoat, a similar discrepancy between form and content becomes apparent. While Clarissa as "high priest"⁸ presides over the initial stages of the ceremony—her party—she deftly avoids assuming the priestly role, with all the responsibility it implies, when it comes to the actual sacrifice, by shifting to the role of prophetic denouncer of the very rite that she had prepared. What is more, her vision subverts the fundamental significance of the rite, for in these moments it is not the power of life which she celebrates but rather the high appeal and beauty of death.

Finally, while one might be tempted to see in Septimus the dying and resurrected god of mythology, a comparison between the man who actually dies and the image she resurrects offers a different interpretation. Like the ambulance that so efficiently removes Septimus' mangled remains in the name of civilization, Clarissa's reconstruction largely ignores the human specificity that underlies her image. For her Septimus has no substantive reality; he has no past, he does not even have a name—she refers to him repeatedly as "that young man who killed himself." Visionary resurrection is but a word; in point of fact, by reducing Septimus to a symbolic leap of defiance, Clarissa, no less than society, indulges in ritual sacrifice—the sacrifice of an individual reality in favor of the vision.⁹

In the introduction to his brilliant work on repetition in fiction, Hillis Miller, following Deleuze, distinguishes two major types of repetition in Western literature, based on the Platonic and Nietzschean models respectively. The Platonic, he states, "is grounded in a solid archetypal model which is untouched by the effects of repetition. All the other examples are copies of this model. The assumption of such a world gives rise to the notion of a metaphoric expression based on genuine participative similarity or even on identity. . . ." The Nietzschean mode, on the other hand, "posits a world based on difference" in which each thing is "unique, intrinsically different from every other thing. Similarity arises against the background of this 'disparité du fond'" and presents a world not of copies but of "simulacra," or "ungrounded doublings."¹⁰

If we look at the transfiguration passage of *Mrs. Dalloway* in the light of this distinction, it becomes clear that while Clarissa invokes the first form of repetition, seeking to valorize her personal moment

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through various archetypal models, her constantly shifting images of Septimus and of herself, as well as the relation between these images and the characters to which they relate, reveal rather the second form, the world of simulacra, with all the connotations of illusion that this word includes. In point of fact, Clarissa is not merging her individual moment with a timeless model, but adapting a number of timeless models to the constant fluidity of her perceptions, so that the notion of multiplicity itself becomes the visionary prototype for her ever-changing roles.

The truly grounded repetition, however—unwittingly performed by Clarissa—relates not to the images she invokes but to the existential position that they serve to mask. Indeed, by the end of the passage, Clarissa has reverted from her initial identification with Septimus' leap, that is from imaginative enactment, to the passive onlooker position—encoded in the grieving mother—that has characterized her day and which she sought in these moments to overcome. "She had once thrown a shilling into the Serpentine, never anything more," she had lamented when she first heard of his death, "but he had flung it away." In her own terms, by identifying with Septimus' leap she overcomes her "perpetual sense . . . of being outside, looking on" (p. 11). Simultaneously, she consummates this exclusion in its ultimate form—death—and in so doing reaches the "mystical center," the embrace that had eluded her grasp. For her, momentarily, outside has become the true locus of being, attained through a vision that both defies and, for her, replaces reality.

Beyond the spell of her subjectivity, however, her transcendence of the onlooker stance is deceptive. The discrepancy between Septimus' death and her reconstruction negates her sense of mystical union, and her subsequent return to the party denies the commitment to selfhood she had glorified in his leap. With words that in any other context would appear heartless and smug—"she felt glad that *he* had done it" (emphasis added)—she gracefully revokes the unity she had previously affirmed, and with a loving look back at the death she has not died, she simply returns to the world she had denounced. Imaginary action is thus resolved into non-action: Clarissa's vision is like the shilling she had once thrown into the Serpentine, and she herself, the onlooker newly configured as *mater dolorosa*, still stands on the edge.

The allusions to various myths and traditions become an ever-receding *jeu de miroirs* through which Clarissa loses and re-creates herself in another form. "It is the privilege of loneliness; in privacy one may do as one chooses," Peter Walsh had said (p. 167). By enacting for

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herself an entire drama of death and transfiguration, Clarissa can see herself in a rich plurality that essentially reenacts her incapacity to choose and legitimizes conflicting roles—romantic rebel, victim, seer, grieving mother—without confining her to any.¹¹

The model for her self-protective dissociation, however, has already been established by the text. By casting Clarissa's potential destiny as an entirely separate character, textually present but unacknowledged by the heroine until death negates its threat, Woolf has created the prototype of imaginative self-evasion. Through the metaphor of parallel fates she—not unlike Bradshaw—is suggesting that madness can be contained, that it can live itself out, as it were, without Clarissa having to live it or to be directly confronted with its terrifying and complex reality. Unlike Peter Walsh, who represents another unlived destiny of Clarissa's, Septimus never enters her life to challenge her preconceptions. The dead, as Lily Briscoe once pointed out, are “at our mercy,”¹² and visionary images do not answer back. In the figure of Septimus, Woolf is thus redefining the double, no longer a troublesome alter ego such as Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* or Ivan Karamazov's devil, who invade the hero's life to precipitate painful self-confrontation, but on the contrary as a bracketed entity whose self-effacing (and ultimately self-canceling) evolution actually *releases* the hero from the need to face its implications.

As Hillis Miller has pointed out, Clarissa's day is a resurrection of the past and the dead.¹³ But if this is so, its culmination is no more than a ritualized evasion of precisely that world of death which she had appeared to embrace. However, in a final Christological allusion the text betrays her betrayal: as she takes inner leave of Septimus, she hears the clock striking one, two, three. . . .

¹ See John Vickery, “Mythopoesis and Modern Literature,” in *The Shaken Realist: Essays in Modern Literature*, ed. Melvin Friedman and John B. Vickery (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1970), p. 223.

² Deborah Guth, “‘What a lark! What a plunge!’: Fiction as Self-Evasion in *Mrs. Dalloway*,” *Modern Language Review*, 84 (1989), 18–25.

³ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 33. All subsequent references are to this edition and are included parenthetically in the text.

⁴ In this context, see Suzette Henke's comparison between Septimus and Michael Furey in Joyce's “The Dead” as “romantic martyrs.” Like Shelley's Adonaïs, Henke points out, both escape through death from “the contagion of the world's slow stain,” a phrase that Clarissa actually mulls over in the short story “Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street.” (“Virginia Woolf Reads James Joyce: The

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Ulysses Notebook," in *James Joyce: The Centennial Symposium*, ed. Morris Beja, Phillip Herring, Maurice Harmon, and David Norris [Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1986], pp. 40–41).

⁵ For this interpretation, see Jeremy Hawthorn, *Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway: A Study in Alienation* (Sussex, Eng.: Sussex Univ. Press, 1975), p. 33, and Alice van Buren Kelley, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 107.

⁶ For the image of Clarissa as *mater dolorosa* I am indebted to Suzette Henke, "Mrs. Dalloway: The Communion of Saints," in *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*, ed. Jane Marcus (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1981), pp. 141–44.

⁷ Avrom Fleishman refers to a cycle of "withdrawal and return" which is a variation on the same pattern (*Virginia Woolf: A Critical Reading* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1975], p. 88). See also Erwin R. Steinberg, "Mrs. Dalloway and T. S. Eliot's Personal Wasteland," *Journal of Modern Literature*, 10 (1983), 18–19. For an in-depth analysis of this pattern, see Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, trans. P. Mairet (London: Collins, 1968), pp. 80–86, 198–204.

⁸ Henke, "Mrs. Dalloway: The Communion of Saints," p. 126.

⁹ Alex Zwerdling discusses how the governing class translates individuals into "cases" or categories in order to protect itself and maintain control (*Virginia Woolf and the Real World* [Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1986], pp. 124, 128). Clarissa duplicates this procedure on the internal level by transforming Septimus into a symbol. There is also an interesting parallel between Clarissa's approach and Mrs. Ramsay's attitude to Paul and Minta: "Mrs. Ramsay, Lily felt, exalted (marriage), worshipped (it); held her hands over it to warm them, to protect it; and yet, having brought it all about, somehow laughed, led her victims, Lily felt, to the altar." (*Virginia Woolf, To the Lighthouse* [Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1964], p. 117). In both instances, sanctification involves the sacrifice of the individual reality.

¹⁰ J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982), p. 6.

¹¹ Clarissa's capacity to transform the outside world into art "simply by looking" is emphasized by Ellen Rosenman (*The Invisible Presence: Virginia Woolf and the Mother-Daughter Relationship* [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1986], p. 91). This is clearly what Clarissa does: she transforms both Septimus' death and her own self-image into high art. Maria DiBattista's comment on Woolf's art, however, is eminently applicable to Clarissa herself: "Her art . . . creates those necessary fictions that conceal the void incertitude, [it is] the Conradian art [of lying] that finds its ultimate justification in the lie that saves." (*Virginia Woolf's Major Novels: The Fables of Anon* [New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1980], p. 55).

¹² Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, p. 198.

¹³ J. Hillis Miller, "Virginia Woolf's All Souls' Day: The Omniscient Narrator in *Mrs. Dalloway*," in *The Shaken Realist: Essays in Modern Literature*, ed. Friedman and Vickery, p. 115.

Live Orientals and Dead Greeks: Forster's Response to the Chanak Crisis

DAVID ROESSEL

Hellenism and Orientalism held positions of central importance in E. M. Forster's thought and writings. These two ideas are sometimes difficult to reconcile. This was particularly true during the Greco-Turkish War of 1921–22, when the competing claims of Greek and Turkish nationalists, echoed by their English supporters, often appeared in the British press.¹ The war culminated in the Chanak crisis, which put England on the brink of military action against Turkey. Forster commented publicly on the Chanak crisis three times. His responses were determined less by contemporary political concerns than by his personal attitude to Hellenism and the Orient. In fact, Forster's statements on the Chanak affair help to clarify his perception of the East and Greece.

As part of the peace settlement after World War I, Turkey was forced to cede large amounts of territory to the victors. England received Iraq and Palestine; France took Syria; and Constantinople and the Straits of the Hellespont became an international zone. In addition, the treaty mandated that Turkey would lose land on either end of Anatolia. In the West, Greece, which had joined the Allies in 1917, acquired a foothold in Asia Minor near Smyrna. In the East, an independent Armenia under the protection of the Great Powers was projected. The new Turkey was to be a small rump of the Ottoman Empire.²

The resentment of the Turks to the terms of the peace led to the formation of a separate government in Ankara led by Mustapha Kemal,

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who rejected the agreements made by Turkish leaders in Constantinople. Because of Kemalist violations of the peace accords, Greece was allowed to expand its activities in Asia Minor. The confrontation between Greeks and Turks, traditional enemies, ended in open war in 1921. For almost a year the Turks were on the defensive, but in August of 1922, they broke through the Greek line and advanced to the Aegean Sea. After Smyrna was occupied on September 9, the Turks sought to follow up their victory by reclaiming Constantinople and Eastern Thrace. Standing in their way were the British, French, and Italian troops assigned to defend the international zone. Of the three powers, England had been the most supportive of the Greek effort and was now the most opposed to the Turkish advance.

When Turkish troops entered the neutral zone and confronted British forces stationed at Chanak, the British government, led by Lloyd George and Churchill, planned a forceful response in the hopes that the Turks would withdraw. On September 15, Churchill, then Secretary of the Colonies, sent a telegram to the heads of the dominions requesting that troops be raised. He closed his message by saying:

Not only does the Freedom of the Straits for which such immense sacrifices were made in the war involve vital imperial and world-wide interests, but we cannot forget that there are 20,000 British and Anzac graves in the Gallipoli Peninsula and that it would be an abiding source of grief to the Empire if these were to fall into the ruthless hands of the Kemalists.³

On the following day, a similar statement was released to the press. The blatant attempt to stir up patriotic enthusiasm for possible military action failed badly. On September 18, the *Daily Mail* ran a headline demanding, "STOP THIS NEW WAR." In an editorial, the *Nation and Athenaeum* on September 23 said, "To seek for any rational aim or object in this antic would be a waste of time Apparently there are not enough graves in Gallipoli."⁴ The same sentiment was expressed in many other newspapers and magazines through editorials and letters. On September 21, a delegation of trade union officials went to Downing Street to voice their opposition to a war with Turkey. Still, the British troops stood firm at Chanak, even after the French and Italians withdrew. This prompted Bonar Law, the retired leader of the Conservative Party, to break with the government and announce in a letter to the *Times* on October 7, "We cannot act alone as the policeman of the world."⁵ On October 11, Britain and Turkey resolved the Chanak crisis without recourse to arms, but the reputations of Lloyd George and Churchill as warmongers were hardly diminished. The Chanak

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crisis contributed greatly to the fall of Lloyd George's coalition government a few weeks later.

On October 9, 1922, Forster wrote a letter to the *Daily News* praising a submission by A. A. Milne five days earlier. Milne, like many writers, portrayed Lloyd George and Churchill as spoiling for a fight. Milne then undercut the reasons given for mobilization.

I am told that we are to fight: (1) for England's honor; (2) for the freedom of the Straits; (3) for the sanctity of our graves in Gallipoli Graves are sacred only when England occupies the earth in which they were dug. There were airmen who fell within the German boundaries Foolishly we allowed the Germans to keep that land. We should be occupying it. (p. 4e)

Milne's perspective is Anglocentric throughout. The British are weary of war and wary of leaders who will send another wave of young men to their deaths. The issues that led to the crisis are largely ignored.

Forster wrote in response:

Mr. A. A. Milne's brilliant article deserves special thanks for its scathing analysis of "the sanctity of our graves in Gallipoli." Our rulers knew that their policy would not be popular, and in the hopes of stampeding us into it they permitted this vile appeal—the viler because the sentiment that it tries to pervert is a noble one and purifies the life of a nation when directed rightly. The bodies of the young men who were buried out there have become spirit; whether they were British or Turk, they have no quarrel with one another now, no part in our patronage, no craving for more holocausts of young men. Anyone who has himself entered, however feebly, into the life of the spirit, can realise this.⁶

Forster ends with an attack on Lloyd George and Churchill, adding a wish that they might be retired in the next election. The most noteworthy difference from Milne's piece was Forster's assertion that the dead at Gallipoli had no further quarrel with one another. While most of the English thought it was silly to go to war to protect the graves of the dead, that did not mean they would accept Forster's belief about a posthumous reconciliation between enemies. Many would have held that the English dead were now in heaven and the Turkish dead, not being Christian, were elsewhere. For example, a British official said at the time, "the average man does not care a straw whether Eastern Thrace and Adrianople belong to the Greeks or Turks. In my view both are absolute barbarians and have recently proved it."⁷ In the highly charged atmosphere of the Chanak crisis, Forster's suggestion that Anglo-Turkish hostility has ended in the afterlife has an ulterior,

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political motive. He wants to use the dead to reduce anti-Turkish sentiment among the living.

In "Our Graves in Gallipoli," first published in the *New Leader* on October 20, Forster developed further the idea that the dead on Gallipoli have found peace with each other. The sketch describes how the occupant of one grave discovers, after seven years, that his neighbor was once his enemy. Forster repeats many of the charges against Lloyd George and Churchill, who are depicted as looking for land for more graves.

There is still room over in Chanak. Also, it is well for a nation that would be great to scatter its graves all over the world. Graves in Ireland, graves in Irak, Russia, Persia, India, each with its inscription from the Bible or Rupert Brooke. When England thinks fit, she can launch an expedition to protect the sanctity of her graves, and can follow that by another expedition to protect the sanctity of the additional graves.⁸

Forster's cleverness in "Our Graves" deserves mention. The piece was published after numerous satires about Chanak had already appeared. Yet Forster was able to present his viewpoint in a new and effective way.

The revelation that one grave holds an Englishman and the other a Turk comes at the very end of the dialogue.

FIRST GRAVE: What! a Turk? You a Turk? And I have lain beside you for seven years and never known!

SECOND GRAVE: How should you have known? What is there to know except that I am your brother?

FIRST GRAVE: I am yours . . .

SECOND GRAVE: All is dead except that. All graves are one. It is their unity which sanctifies them, and some day even the living will learn this.

FIRST GRAVE: Ah, but why can they not learn it while they are still alive?

His comrade cannot answer this . . .

(AH, pp. 34-35)

The graves have reached precisely the understanding that Forster mentioned in his earlier letter in the *Daily News*. But it is important that the Englishman has gained this knowledge from the Turk, just as Forster personally found his consciousness expanded by contact with the East. The transfer of knowledge from East to West is underscored by the fact that the Turk appears to have known the identity of his neighbor all along, or at least from the beginning of the dialogue, when the First Grave speaks of Lloyd George as his leader and says that his brother died in Antwerp. Nor does this information bring forth the exclamation, "What! You are English!" The subtle significance of the

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placement of the graves “*looking out across the Dardanelles toward Asia and the East*” becomes clear (AH, p. 32, Forster’s italics). From that direction comes wisdom.

The end of “Our Graves” anticipates opinions expressed in “Salute to the Orient!,” which appeared the following year. There Forster said that for the Oriental, “firstly . . . personal relationship is most important for him” (AH, p. 273). For this reason, “the individual in the East must succeed as an individual or he has failed. That is our lesson. If he relies on the temporary popularity of his country he builds upon sand” (AH, p. 269). For Forster, the East is a place where personal ties are important, whereas the West stresses national or class associations. For example, in “Liberty in England,” he writes: “I know very well how limited, and open to criticism, English freedom is. It is race-bound and class-bound” (AH, p. 63). These ideas are central to *A Passage to India*, which Forster was working on in the early 1920s. The Anglo-Indians as a group perceive everything in racial terms. About the Indian women at the “Bridge Party,” Mrs. Turton tells Mrs. Moore, “You’re superior to them anyway. Don’t forget that. You’re superior to everyone in India except one or two of the Ranis, and they’re on an equality.”⁹ Later, when Mrs. Moore criticizes her son’s treatment of the Indians, he answers, “Oh, look here, what do you and Adela want me to do? Go against my class, against all the people I respect and admire out here?” (PI, p. 50). An Oriental, on the other hand, is described as one who can instinctively tell if someone is his friend (PI, pp. 23, 311). Since Forster views the Eastern outlook as superior, a Westerner can benefit from contact with the East.

But Forster also realizes that Western expansion and dominance threatens the East. In “Salute,” this knowledge leads to a prayer “that the East may be delivered from Europe the known and Russia the unknown, and may remain the East” (AH, p. 269). The tension between Forster’s desire to bring Westerners closer to the East and his simultaneous hope that the East will remain separate and distant from the West helps to explain his repeated use of the motif of postponed or posthumous friendship between English and Orientals. In both “Our Graves” and *A Passage to India*, the final words are spoken by Englishmen, who ask why friendship between East and West is not possible for the living. In “Our Graves,” the dead Englishman asks, “Ah, but why can they not learn it while they are still alive?” (AH, p. 35), and in *A Passage* Fielding says, “Why can’t we be friends now?” (p. 332). In both cases the Oriental leaves the question unanswered. The Turk does not know the answer, whereas in *A Passage* the sky replies, “No, not

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yet. . . . No, not there." The posthumous reconciliation between Orientals and English presented in the *Daily News* letter and "Our Graves," which were written only a year or so before the conclusion of *A Passage*, suggests one place where Fielding and Aziz can truly become friends. It is an indication of the lengths to which Forster will go to ensure the East will remain the East.¹⁰

Forster's impression that the East needed such defenders in the early 1920s is clear from the end of "Salute." Forster justifies the generalizations that he has made about so vast an area as the Orient "partly because all who love the East ought to testify *at the present moment*, however great their ignorance, and partly because it recalls, scattered over so many classes and countries, one's Oriental friends" (AH, p. 273, my italics). A major reason the East needed defenders after the Great War was the division of Turkey, which led to the confrontation at Chanak. So Forster's comments in "Salute" encourage us to take his writing on the Chanak crisis as testimony in defense of the East. Further, the conjunction between contemporary politics and friendship with Orientals indicates that Forster's outlook on the Chanak crisis would be heavily influenced by Forster's Muslim friends.

Forster's third response to the Chanak crisis, "India and the Turk," published in the *Nation and Athenaeum* on September 30 under the letter "F.," clearly shows such influence. It also helps to put in better perspective the latent political issues of the *Daily News* letter and "Our Graves," both of which were written after "India and the Turk."

In "India and the Turk," Forster warns that while England might support Greece, India is behind Turkey. Muslims were, naturally, the most vocal supporters of the Turks. But other Indians, such as Gandhi, also voiced support for Turkey, for, as Forster puts it, "when a neighbor has interests that do not collide with our own, we are apt to express our sympathy."¹¹ Forster omits the fact that Gandhi used his support of the Khilafat movement, which was organized to protest the possible removal of the Caliphate from Constantinople, to bring the Muslims into the orbit of his Indian National Movement.¹² So while Gandhi's motives were in fact political, in Forster's article they appear to be another example of the personal, neighborly relations that Forster found in the East.

Forster attributes the attachment of Indian Muslims to Turkey and, in particular, Constantinople, home of the Caliphate, to the rise of Pan-Islamism. He acknowledges that this is a fairly recent development and holds little historical weight. But he argues that:

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even if the Pro-Turkish movement was "artificial" in its origins, it is "natural" now, that is to say, it is part of the Mohammedan's mental outfit. He (also she, for the Purdah is equally vehement) instinctively connects the future of Constantinople with that of his own religion. History may not support him But his emotion—that exists Moreover—the Khilafat apart—Turkey has a special appeal to him as the one surviving power from a great past (IT, p. 844)

Forster adds that Eastern apprehension about Turkey is heightened by "Europe's remorseless crusade to-day."

No doubt Europe is not really Christian, either in theory or in fact, and few of her own children retain any illusion on this point. But to the Mohammedan, continually vexed by her aggressions, she does seem Christian, and for him the Crusades did not end with St. Louis, but are still in progress. He need not go back to the Middle Ages; he can observe what he has lost in North Africa and in Central Asia during the last twenty years

And now the savior arises, Mustapha Kemal, in the restricted area that is left to the Ottomans. He attacks not Great Britain, but the ally whom Great Britain has had the least reason to love—King Constantine of Greece. He drives the Greeks out of Smyrna and then turns northward. France and Italy, the other Christian Powers, do not hinder him. It is Great Britain, the protector of Islam, who appears as a solitary crusader, whose troops remain in Chanak, whose fleet holds the Straits, and whose Ministers assert that the British Empire stands behind them. (IT, pp. 844–45)

Forster has accurately reflected the attitude of Muslims in India. He had an opportunity to learn it firsthand during his stay in Hyderabad with his old friend, Syed Ross Masood, during January 1922.¹³ Masood, already a devoted Pan-Islamist when Forster met him in 1906, was involved in the Khilafat movement. But Forster does more than just report the views of Masood and other Muslims, for the tone of the piece indicates that Forster agrees with them.¹⁴ This is evident at the end of the article, where Forster says that British policy has been "an evil day's work, and the evil this Government has done will live after them" (IT, p. 845). The correspondent, as he is called by the *Nation and Athenaeum*, shows little objectivity. We are led to think that the primary concern of the English with respect to Constantinople and Turkey should be the feelings of the Indian Muslims, despite the fact that those feelings are not unique or, in the circumstances, at all compelling.

For example, the Orthodox Christians could, as Forster was surely

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aware, claim a greater and more historical connection to Constantinople. After the war, there were meetings and demonstrations in England to have the famous church of Justinian, St. Sophia, restored to the Christians. One philhellene, with precisely the opposite opinion from Forster, proclaimed, "On that day . . . when the Cross, symbol of the law of the ages, rises above St. Sophia, the peace of the Orient will be secure."¹⁵ Many Christians in the Balkans had only gained freedom from Ottoman rule in the previous two decades. Supporters of the Greeks saw the Greco-Turkish conflict not as an opportunity for Western aggrandizement, but rather as a chance to rescue more Christians from Turkish oppression. And if it was perfectly natural for Muslims in India to support Muslims in Turkey, it was also natural for Christians in England to assist Christians in Greece. Finally, if British policy was an evil sign to Indians, the Turkish slaughter of tens of thousands of Armenians was a far more evil sign to Christians in Constantinople and Thrace. Both Lloyd George and Churchill were concerned about the possibility of a large-scale massacre if the British simply withdrew, especially after the destruction of Smyrna by the Turks on September 13, 1922.¹⁶ Forster mentions Smyrna without a hint of the massacre, which occurred just weeks before. This is not to suggest that all of the claims of the Greeks and their supporters were viable and accurate, but rather to show that Forster was a partisan rather than a reporter. "India and the Turk" is not journalism; it is rather testimony from one who loves the East.

Forster's support for the Turks also reveals itself in the subtle way he attempts to undercut Greece's claims for assistance. In "Our Graves," the English Grave says, "It was the Greeks who, seven years ago, failed to join England after they had promised to do so, and our graves in Gallipoli are the result of this" (AH, p. 34). While it serves Forster's purpose to place the blame for the Gallipoli disaster on the Greeks, it is quite simply abysmal history.¹⁷ The idea that Greece was somehow an inferior ally also surfaces in "India and the Turk," where Forster calls King Constantine "the ally whom Great Britain has had least reason to love" (p. 845). This was true. It was only after Constantine had been forced to leave the country in 1917 that Greece joined the Entente. His return in 1920 was viewed with dismay by the victorious powers. Still, if Constantine had leaned toward the Germans, Turkey had actually joined them. Forster's attacks on Greece's status as an ally were intended to mitigate the fact that Turkey had been on the other side in the conflict.¹⁸

Forster once told an interviewer that he had "never been much

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involved in politics Incidentally, of course, I have."¹⁹ Forster's Chanak writing was obviously political, and it suggests that his assertion about politics was somewhat disingenuous. In the two pieces to which he signed his name, Forster attempts to lessen public hostility to the Turks in a subtle way. The *Daily News* letter and "Our Graves" appear to place the author above the fray as an impartial observer. This was simply a pose, for the unsigned "India and the Turk" and some of his private letters reveal the depth of his commitment to the Turks. Perhaps Forster thought that by not revealing his partisanship in his signed work, he would better gain the political effect that he desired. In any event, the discrepancy between the tone of the work that he made public in his own name and the unsigned article raises questions about Forster's public disavowal of political interest.

Forster's strong support for the Turks in 1922 was not unexpected, since years before he had adopted the ideas on which that support was based. In fact, Forster's views on Eastern personal relations and vulnerability predate his first trip to the Orient. They were formed from Forster's friendship with Masood while the latter was studying in England. In his diary for December 24, 1906, Forster wrote, "Masood gives up his duties for his friend—which is civilisation. Though as he remarks, 'Hence the confusion in Oriental states. To them personal relations come first.'"²⁰ So in "Salute" seventeen years later, Forster was simply paraphrasing Masood. His Indian friend further fostered the association of friendship and the Orient by his assertion to Forster that he (Forster) was "about the only Englishman in whom I have come across true sentiment & that, too, real sentiment even from the oriental point of view. So you know what it is that makes me love you so much, it is the fact that in you I see an oriental with an oriental view of life *on most things*" (italics in original).²¹ Such flattery from the man he was in love with increased Forster's desire to identify himself with the Oriental view of life.

Masood and Forster had considered a trip to Constantinople in 1910, which they never made. During the planning, Masood wrote Forster:

Whatever happens, don't let us give up Constantinople. I shall go alone with you, but we must make an honest effort to make it come off. Dearest boy if you knew how much I loved you & how I long to be alone with you in that romantic part of the world you would never dream of changing our original plans . . . Let us get away from the conventional world.²²

The passage places Constantinople in the web of ideas associated with

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the East and Masood. As the place where, in Masood's view, the two friends could escape the conventional world, the city would have a special place in Forster's mind. He would certainly not want to see it become another Western city.

It was also through Masood that Forster came to feel strongly about Europe's remorseless crusade. Masood longed for the glories of the Muslim past and viewed each Western encroachment with alarm. The connection between European expansion and Turkey was heightened by the fact that Forster had been able to view Masood's reaction to Western aggression against Turkey on earlier occasions. During his first trip to India in 1912, the Balkan War had broken out. Forster was present when a famous Pan-Islamist, Mohammed Ali, threatened suicide because the Bulgarian army was within twenty-five miles of Constantinople. Masood was also deeply affected by the Turkish defeat. Forster reports him saying, "This is the turning point of my career. We shall give the Turks all the money that we have collected for the University [the Muslim University at Aligarh]."²³ And in August of the previous year, 1911, Forster had spent a holiday in Italy with Masood. While they were there, Italy, which had long coveted Tripoli and the coast of Libya, issued an ultimatum to Turkey. On September 28, shortly after Masood had returned to England, the Italo-Turkish War began. The effect it had on Forster is clear from his unpublished novel, *Arctic Summer*. In one fragment, Cyril tells Martin Whitley, the main character, that he wants to go to Tripoli and fight for the Turks. Martin responds:

"Here's a clear issue . . . there aren't too many."

"There aren't any."

"For people who understand politics and history there mayn't be any," said Cyril with disarming humility. "But there will always be clear issues, here and there, for men like me. Those Italians have got to be smashed."²⁴

The fact that Cyril wants to go off to fight against Europe's remorseless crusade is further stressed by the use made in the fragments of the historical Crusades, particularly as depicted in frescoes at the Castle of Malpaga.²⁵

The motif of posthumous friendship between English and Turks also appeared in Forster's prewar writing. "Mr. Andrews," a story published in April 1911, tells how an Englishman and a Turk meet and form a friendship on the way to heaven. When they reach the gate, each puts aside concern for his own soul and petitions for the admittance of his new friend. Both gain entry, but neither finds in heaven any

happiness that equals the moment outside the gate when each sought entry for the other. So they decide to leave together. At their departure, "they felt again the pressure of the world soul . . . they suffered it to break upon them, and they, and all the experience they had gained, and all the love and wisdom they had generated, passed into it, and made it better."²⁶ Forster undoubtedly had this story in mind when he wrote the *Daily News* letter and "Our Graves." The idea that the posthumous friendship of Muslims with Christians somehow benefits the living as well as the dead underlies his responses in 1922. But, like Forster's other writing on this theme, "Mr. Andrews" holds out little hope that such understanding will occur during our stay in the flesh. The Turk died at the hands of Christians, while Mr. Andrews' son was killed by a Turkish brigand, who may in fact be the Turk he meets. "Perhaps you killed him?" "It is very possible" (*CT*, p. 227).

It is tempting to read the allusion in "Mr. Andrews" as a fictional response to the Italo-Turkish War similar to the Tripoli fragment of *Arctic Summer*. This is impossible, since "Mr. Andrews" was published four months before Italy declared war on Turkey. But the fact that the Turk in the story comes from Salonika and was part of a band of Muslim brigands in Macedonia gives the story another contemporary reference. Macedonia had revolted from Turkey in 1903. Although the revolt was suppressed, for the rest of the decade armed bands of various ethnic groups continued to operate in the area. In 1908, after the Young Turks had replaced the Ottoman ruler, the Turks took punitive measures against the Christian population in order to prevent further unrest. At the same time, atrocities were committed against Christians in other parts of Turkey, particularly a large massacre of Armenians at Adana in Asia Minor in April 1909. These acts were widely reported in the English press along with occasional outbursts of violence against foreigners.²⁷ For example, on January 24, 1911, the *London Times* told how two hundred armed Muslim villagers had burned acres of forest land owned by British subjects. Criticism of Turkey grew in Western Europe. In January 1911, the Marquis of Lansdowne condemned the Turks in a speech in the House of Lords. In May of the same year, Christian leaders of various denominations sent a message of protest to Constantinople.²⁸ Since "Mr. Andrews" was written in the midst of this public concern about the Christians under Turkish rule, it has the same subtle political purpose as "Our Graves": to reduce Anglo-Turkish hostility by employing a vision of harmony between the two religions. Already in 1911, Forster was defending the East from its detractors.

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A comparison of "Our Graves" and "Mr. Andrews" reveals that Forster's position had not changed at all from 1911 to 1922. The Great War had no effect, despite the fact that the Turks had sided with Germany. Forster's letters from Alexandria during the war contain no rancor toward the Turks. For example, on August 25, 1916, he wrote:

I have talked to several men who were in the Kut hospitals when the Turks entered, and they say that they behaved admirably, even buying kit at a fair price when they could have taken it for nothing. It is a great problem what to do with a nation that is at its best in war and its worst in peace. Our men have become so fond of the Turks that the authorities have had to give them lectures on Armenian atrocities, etc., to cocker them up.²⁹

British forces in the East did indeed develop a respect for the Turks, just as those who fought on the Western front did for the Germans.³⁰ But Forster surely exaggerates when he says that they were so fond of the Turks that they were reluctant to fight. More likely, any reluctance was due to an unwillingness to die and disgust with the senselessness of the slaughter. And the callous manner in which Forster treats the genocide of the Armenians is somewhat shocking. While the use of the massacres by British officers to incite the anger of troops was manipulative, there is no hint in Forster, here or elsewhere, of sympathy for the victims. One wonders if he bothered to hear any of the lectures.

Forster has no feeling for the Armenians because he shares the views of the Turks about Oriental Christians. His attitude is revealed in a postwar letter to Florence Barger. One of Forster's acquaintances in Alexandria, George Antonius, a Syrian Christian, objected to Forster's pamphlet on the situation in Egypt. A third individual suggested to Forster that if the British stayed in Egypt, Antonius might prevent Forster from obtaining a passport to visit the country. Forster was understandably concerned that a denial would mean he could not see Mohammed el Adl, his friend and lover. The information was, of course, false. The British stayed on in Egypt and Forster visited whenever he wished. After complaining to Barger that the Syrians and Armenians in Egypt "only retain their footing as jackals to the British," he concludes, "God damn those Oriental Christians! I understand why the Turks cut their throats" (*SL*, I, 318). This was in 1920, when the Armenian atrocities were common knowledge. Forster's anger at one Oriental Christian does not mitigate the barbarity of the sentiment.

Forster obviously did not sympathize with Greek aspirations, but

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there were numerous philhellenes in England who fervently did. Indeed, Forster's Chanak writing was partly intended to counteract the pro-Greek missives of such people as T. P. O'Connor, a member of Parliament, and R. M. Burrows, an Oxford classicist.³¹ One of Forster's mentors, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, shared the concern about the fate of the Balkan Christians. In *The European Anarchy*, published in 1916, Dickinson complains about the settlement the European powers made with Turkey in 1878, saying that it placed "the inhabitants of Macedonia for another generation under the murderous oppression of the Turks" and "perpetuated for years the Balkan hell."³² Clearly, Dickinson hoped the Balkans would be free of the Turks.

Forster knew of Greek hopes concerning Constantinople not only from the writing of English philhellenes, but from Greeks he met in Alexandria during the war. In a letter he talks of his activities in the city:

There are other escapes—the Syrians, the Italians, the Bedouin, etc.—but I prefer the Greek, for the Greeks are the only community here that attempt to understand what they are talking about, and to be with them is to reenter, however imperfectly, the Academic world. They are the only important people east of Ventimiglia—: dirty, dishonest, unaristocratic, roving, and warped by Hellenic and Byzantine dreams—but they do effervesce intellectually, they do have creative desires, and one comes round to them in the end. (SL, I, 266)

Forster did not come around enough to consider their "Hellenic and Byzantine dreams" anything but warped, even though the Muslim dreams of the Pan-Islamists at Aligarh were no less so.

Since personal relations account for so much in Forster's life and writing, his different response to Muslim and Greek aspirations might be traced to the attitude of two important figures in each community. Masood, as we have seen, was a strong enthusiast for the Muslim cause. Constantine Cavafy, the Alexandrian poet whom Forster admired, is a more difficult figure to pin down.³³ Cavafy said that he was deeply moved by Greece's victory in the Balkan Wars of 1912–13, but appeared, or tried to appear, unmoved by the Smyrna disaster of 1922.³⁴ Such ambiguities fill Cavafy's life as well as his writing. Forster, in any case, portrays Cavafy as critical of his fellow Greeks. He wrote Christopher Isherwood that Cavafy once said, "Never forget about the Greeks that we are bankrupt. That is the difference between us and ancient Greeks, and my dear Forster, between us and yourselves" (SL, II, 118).

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Forster agreed that there was a gap between ancient and modern Greeks. An earlier section of the letter to Isherwood reads: "Do I know Greece well? I should hope so. I was there in 1903 and have not been there since. I got tuned up by a modern Greek who stole another archaeologist's coat before we landed, and said I had given it to him" (*SL*, II, 118).

On the basis of a visit thirty years before, Forster ironically claimed to know Greece well. For Forster, modern Greece was a land of hucksters always after money and possessions. His perception is a far cry from that of G. L. Dickinson, who was inspired by his 1896 visit to Greece and subsequently often returned.³⁵ Paradoxically, Dickinson did not care for India.³⁶

Because of Forster's dislike of modern Greece, his Hellenism has no geographical dimension in the same way his Orientalism is spatially connected to the East. Rather, Forster's Hellenism consisted of ideas that reside in the mind and, if they had any locality, they were now in Cambridge libraries and the British Museum. The travel pieces Forster wrote after his 1903 trip to Greece reveal his thinking and show that it predates not only his association with Cavafy, but also his interest in India.

In "Cnidus," Forster describes a visit to the remains of a once important Greek city on the coast of southern Asia Minor. Forster tells of a dreary, uninhabited place seen on a dreary, rainy day. At one point he says:

But I did see the home of the Goddess who has made Cnidus famous to us . . . that Demeter of Cnidus, whom we hold in the British Museum now. She was there at that moment, warm and comfortable in that little recess of hers between the Ephesian Room and the Archaic Room. . . .

I am not going to turn sentimental, and pity the exiled Demeter and declare that her sorrowful eyes are straining for the scarped rock, and the twin harbors, and Triopia, and the sea. She is doing nothing of the sort. . . . And if, as I believe, she is alive, she must know that she has come among people who love her, for all they are so weak-chested and anaemic and feeble-kneed, and who pay her such prosaic homage as they can. (*AH*, pp. 175–76)

The return of antiquities taken from Greece, most especially the Elgin marbles, had been a subject of debate since Byron wrote *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Forster entered that debate briefly with his reflection that the statue of Demeter in the British Museum was a happy exile who has no desire to return to the city in which she was found. For

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Forster, the statue was a symbol of Hellenism, which not only existed in England, but belonged there.

At the end of "Cnidus," Forster relates how the party was joined by a native as they returned to the ship:

It is well known (is it not?) who that extra person always is. This time he came hurrying down to the beach at the last minute, and tried to peer into our faces Everyone made clumsy imitations of his gesture to keep him in a good humor. His manners were perfect. I am not sure that he did not offer to lift people into the boats. But there was a general tendency to avoid his attentions, and we put off in an incredibly short space of time. (AH, pp. 177–78)

This young man undoubtedly expected a fee for his unnecessary service or was looking for an opportunity to "tune up" the group as had the young Greek whom Forster mentions in his letter to Isherwood.³⁷ The nationality of the person is not mentioned, so he could be either Greek or Turkish. But the contrast between the statue in the British Museum and the huckster at Cnidus precisely sums up Forster's notions of Hellenism and the modern Greeks.

Another article published after Forster's trip to Greece also deals with the movement of Hellenism from Greece to the West. "Gemistus Pletho" briefly tells of the life of the famous Greek philosopher who lived at Mistra in the early fifteenth century and desired to return to the worship of the old pagan gods. Forster describes how Pletho came to Italy in 1439 for the Council of Florence and generated a new interest in Greek philosophy, particularly Platönism.

Gemistus went back to Mistra and died only three years before the city was taken by the Turks. Gemistus' hope to revive ancient learning appeared to have failed. But Forster says, "He did not see that the revival had really taken place in Italy; that Greece is a spirit which can appear, not only at any time, but also in any land" (AH, pp. 186–87). Forster reinforces this idea later, when he states that during Gemistus' lifetime "the gods had found their way to Italy, sometimes openly, sometimes in more questionable shape, bearing the emblems of saints and the crowns of martyrs . . ." (AH, p. 191). Gemistus himself becomes part of the movement, for in 1465 his body is taken from Mistra and buried in Rimini. Forster concludes, "The Renaissance can point to many a career which is greater, but to none which is so strangely symbolical" (AH, p. 191). Like the statue of Demeter from Cnidus, the body of Gemistus symbolizes the movement of the Hellenic spirit to the West.

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The extinction of the Hellenic spirit in the eastern Mediterranean also surfaces in *Alexandria: A History and a Guide*. The decline is now linked directly to the rise of Christianity. After relating how Hypatia, the famous fifth-century female philosopher, was killed by a Christian mob, Forster concludes, "with her the Greece that is a spirit expired—the Greece that tried to discover truth and create beauty and that had created Alexandria."³⁸ At the time that the Greeks and Turks opposed each other in Asia Minor, Forster depicted Oriental Christians as the destroyers, not the inheritors, of the classical tradition.

It should be clear why the Chanak crisis did not present Forster with a problem of torn loyalties. For him, live Orientals, who ran the risk of becoming an endangered species, were opposed by Greeks who lacked the spirit of Hellenism. Forster's real Greeks were dead, and the spirits had left the eastern Mediterranean centuries ago. Chanak was not, for Forster, a confrontation between Orientalism and Hellenism, because his notions about the two ideas made such a confrontation impossible.

¹ For example, see the exchange of letters between T. P. O'Connor, a philhellene, and Arnold Toynbee, who supported the Turks after the war, in the *Nation and Athenaeum*, 30 (1921/22) for 3 Dec. 1921, p. 380; 17 Dec. 1921, p. 467; 31 Dec. 1921, p. 528; 5 Jan. 1922, p. 586; 21 Jan. 1922, pp. 618–19; 28 Jan. 1922, pp. 651–52. Forster was away in India at this time, but as a contributor to the magazine he might have seen copies of it either abroad or after his return home.

² On the Chanak crisis and the events leading up to it, see David Walder, *The Chanak Affair* (London: Hutchinson, 1969); Martin Gilbert, *Winston Churchill, Vol. IV: The Stricken World, 1916–1922* (New York: Houghton, 1975), pp. 820–62; and M. L. Smith, *Ionian Vision: Greece in Asia Minor* (London: St. Martin's, 1971).

³ Quoted in Frank Owen, *Tempestuous Journey: Lloyd George, His Life and Times* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1955), p. 635.

⁴ *Nation and Athenaeum*, 31 (1922), 815. The article was unsigned.

⁵ On this see Gilbert, *Winston Churchill*, p. 858.

⁶ *Daily News*, 9 Oct. 1922, p. 6 f.

⁷ Quoted in Gilbert, *Winston Churchill*, p. 837.

⁸ E. M. Forster, *Abinger Harvest* (1936; rpt. New York: Harcourt, 1964), p. 33. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *AH*.

⁹ E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India* (1924; rpt. New York: Harcourt, 1952), pp. 41–42. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *PI*.

¹⁰ See also Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), p. 244, for a discussion of the otherness of the East and the end of *A Passage to India*. Forster's notion of the impossibility of friendship between Easterners and Westerners also grew out of his personal relations with Masood and Mohammed

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ed Adl. On this, see Rustom Bharucha, "Forster's Friends," *Raritan*, 5, No. 4 (1986), 105–07 and 112–14.

¹¹ E. M. Forster, "India and the Turk," *Nation and Athenaeum*, 31 (1922), 844. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *IT*.

¹² See G. K. Das, *E. M. Forster's India* (London: Macmillan, 1977), pp. 61–62, and Frances B. Singh, "A Passage to India, the National Movement, and Independence," *Twentieth Century Literature*, 31 (1985), 267.

¹³ P. N. Furbank, *E. M. Forster: A Life* (New York: Harcourt, 1978), II, 98–102. Forster used the political views of the Khilafat movement in his characterization of Aziz in *A Passage to India*. See Das, *E. M. Forster's India*, pp. 61–62, and Singh, "A Passage to India, the Movement, and Independence," pp. 265–66.

¹⁴ See also Das, *E. M. Forster's India*, pp. 58–59.

¹⁵ George Bourdon, "The Policy of Victory in the East and Its Results," in *Hellas and Unredeemed Hellenism*, trans. C. N. Brown (New York: American Hellenic Society, 1920), p. 32. See also p. 23.

¹⁶ Gilbert, *Winston Churchill*, pp. 853–54.

¹⁷ In fact, on March 1, 1915, the Greeks had offered to occupy Gallipoli and move on Constantinople. Because of Russian objections to Greek control of the Straits, the offer was refused. See Alan Moorhead, *Gallipoli* (New York: Harper, 1956), pp. 78–79.

¹⁸ Political developments in Greece between Sept. 23, when Forster wrote "India and the Turk," and Sept. 30, when it appeared in print, negated this strategy. King Constantine was forced to abdicate a second time on Sept. 27. See Walder, *The Chanak Affair*, pp. 261–62. In his place were the pro-allied Venizelists, whom England had the best reasons to support.

¹⁹ Das, *E. M. Forster's India*, p. 117.

²⁰ Furbank, *Forster: A Life*, I, 145. See also Bharucha, "Forster's Friends," pp. 115–18.

²¹ Furbank, *Forster: A Life*, I, 194.

²² *Ibid.*, I, 193–94.

²³ *Ibid.*, I, 229.

²⁴ E. M. Forster, *Arctic Summer and Other Fiction*, ed. Oliver Stallybrass (London: Edward Arnold, 1980), p. 193.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

²⁶ E. M. Forster, *Collected Tales* (1928; rpt. New York: Knopf, 1947), p. 242. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *CT*.

²⁷ For example, in 1911 the *London Times* reported the maltreatment of Christians in Macedonia on 5 Jan. (5c), 3 Feb. (5c), 8 Feb. (5b), and 14 Mar. (5b). On the Adana Massacre, see the *Times* of 1909 on 16 Apr. (3b), 17 Apr. (7b), 19 Apr. (5a), 20 Apr. (5b), 21 Apr. (5c), and 23 Apr. (5b). There were also many magazine articles, such as Allen Upward's "Bankrupt Turkey," in *Forum*, 44 (1910), 513–24.

²⁸ Alexander Papadopoulos, *Persecutions of the Greeks in Turkey before the European War*, trans. C. N. Brown (New York: American Hellenic Society, 1919), pp. 112–13.

²⁹ *Selected Letters of E. M. Forster*, 2 vols., ed. Mary Lago and P. N. Furbank. (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1983 and 1985), I, 240–41. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *SL*.

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³⁰ See Walder, *The Chanak Affair*, p. 129.

³¹ For O'Connor, see his introduction to *Greece before the Conference* by "Polybius" (London: Methuen, 1919). For Burrows, see "The Unity of the Greek Race," *Contemporary Review*, 115 (1919), 155-64.

³² Goldworthy Lowes Dickinson, *The European Anarchy* (New York: Macmillan, 1916), pp. 100 and 102.

³³ For the possible effect of Cavafy on Forster's historical thought, see G. D. Klingopulos, "E. M. Forster's Sense of the Past: And Cavafy," *Essays in Criticism*, 8 (1958), 156-65.

³⁴ See Robert Liddell, *Cavafy: A Biography* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), pp. 192-93.

³⁵ Forster himself notes this in *Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson* (1934; rpt. London: Edward Arnold, 1973), pp. 89-90.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 117. Forster tried to explain away his mentor's dislike of India by suggesting, "Perhaps he was overtired, perhaps temperamentally averse. . . ."

³⁷ A reader has suggested that the young man at Cnidus evokes Hermes, and the two figures do share some characteristics. But I do not think the young man is wholly imaginary. Earlier in "Cnidus" Forster had said that his group had hastened away when they heard human voices, "for human voices are alarming when they cease to be imaginary" (AH, p. 176).

³⁸ E. M. Forster, *Alexandria: A History and a Guide* (1922; rpt. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986), p. 56.

Fowles's Allegory of Literary Invention: *Mantissa* and Contemporary Theory

RAYMOND J. WILSON III

INTERVIEWER (with reference to post-structuralists): "You seem to make fun of them in *Mantissa*."

FOWLES: "Well, I did in *Mantissa* because I think they've been granted altogether too powerful a position on the intellectual side."¹

An allegory of the creative process structures John Fowles's *Mantissa*, an allegory that proceeds by means of, and within, a parody of contemporary theoretical ideas on that same creative process. Within his parody, Fowles takes hold of the post-structuralist sexual metaphor of texts and transforms it into a unique image of the creative process—the remerging of the public/logical self with the secret/intuitive self in literary creation. Drawing primarily from Roland Barthes but also from Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan, Fowles ridicules the sexual theory of the text while simultaneously transforming it into an interesting and plausible allegorical expression of the creative process. In the allegory, Miles and Erato, the traditional Muse of love poetry (who, in Fowles's novel, has been "stuck" with the whole of fiction as well), are parts of one person. Miles, in his amnesia, has remembered only his social "presentation" self, his logic, and his masculine vanity; all of his forgotten "frivolous," feminine, creative aspects, he sees as another person, Erato. As long as the two remain characters, the closest they can come to union is the sexual act; the

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impossible full recovery from amnesia would mean the remerging of the characters into one person. That this person is John Fowles emerges slowly because the reader does not at first recognize that this novel is transpiring within a skull. The delay leads to refutation; together the two principles of delay and refutation form a paradigm for the mechanism of Fowles's sexual allegory of literary invention in *Mantissa*.²

In providing the parodic vehicle for the allegory, *Mantissa*'s existence proclaims that John Fowles has decided to take the post-structuralist theorists at their word and produce a text that conforms to their explanations. Such parodic writing may take place in each age. For example, Gerald Bruns, interpreting Hugh Kenner, notes that "Joyce shares with Swift and the Swift-like Pope of *The Dunciad* a common point of departure: What would happen if things actually were as our Modern Philosophers represent them to be?" What, for example, would happen "if things were as naturalism represents them to be? Answer: they would be as they are in *Dubliners*," says Bruns, and he continues: "Swift was no Lockean, but he understood how by parodying Locke one could produce Gulliver, whose mental failures are so many descriptions of how the Lockean mind is supposed to work."³ Bruns makes the same point about Locke in reference to Pope. Similarly, we may ask: What would a novel look like if the post-structuralists are right? John Fowles's answer: If they are right a novel will look like *Mantissa*. However, without recognition of the allegorical dimension, Fowles's novel will likely strike the reader as an absurd "mantissa," an unimportant, trivial addition to Fowles's discourse. The allegory exists within a context of this parody of contemporary theory.

Fowles's familiarity with contemporary academic schools of theory is undeniable. In an interview with Carlin Romano, Fowles discusses his unsympathetic responses in his reading of Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan.⁴ More generally, Fowles's work radiates an overall feel that could lead Philip Thody, for example, in his introduction to the English translation of Roland Barthes' *Criticism and Truth*, to say that "contemporary novelists such as John Fowles . . . clearly owe a debt to the style of thinking about prose fiction which Barthes was one of the first to develop."⁵ And the books are sprinkled with specific references. Catherine, in Fowles's story "The Cloud," which ends *The Ebony Tower*, decides that she hates a man named Peter when he responds unintelligently to her explanation of a book by Roland Barthes (possibly *Mythologies*), the translation of which she has been editing. Daniel Martin, in the novel of that name, develops his relationship with Jane, the main female character of the book, through their discussion of the

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writings of the Marxist theorists Georg Lukacs and Antonio Gramsci; Gramsci's words even provide Fowles with the opening epigraph for *Daniel Martin*. The primary transformation of character in the novel comes from Daniel's writing a novel, and his writing develops in response to Lukacs' and Gramsci's ideas, as Daniel interprets them during his conversations with Jane.

Within *Mantissa* itself, Fowles's character, Miles Green, tells Erato that "I feel sure we have one thing in common": resentment of the neglect she has suffered from "the campus faculty factories." In case anyone should wonder what, specifically, he attacks in *Mantissa*, Fowles has his character list the targets: "the structuralists and deconstructivists . . . the semiologists" and "the marxists."⁶ Miles adds "academic Uncle Tom Cobbleigh" to these, referring to an old Devon ballad; and since, according to a standard reference work, Old Tom was the "last named of the seven village worthies who borrowed Tom Pearce's grey mare on which to ride to 'Widecombe Fair,'" Fowles probably means to depict practitioners of all the schools as crowding comically on the back of the single overloaded mare of fiction.⁷

Fowles, is, thus, almost certainly ridiculing contemporary theory in *Mantissa*, and yet he transforms a post-structuralist sexual theory of texts into his own allegory of the creative process.⁸ While limiting its action to the inside of a skull, the allegory performs a gamboling, comic commentary on the creative process and a hilarious debate—with structuralist and post-structuralist theorists—over the artist's position in the process of artistic creation. In an admitted pun, Fowles plays with words by naming one of Erato's avatars Dr. A. Delphie.⁹ Clinically and scientifically, she says "we can offer most" of the sexual positions "in the Kama Sutra" (*M*, p. 39), words which might be a direct parody of Roland Barthes' definition of writing as a treatise of "the science of various blisses of language, its Kama Sutra."¹⁰ *Mantissa* may be an individual text of bliss that provides a critical entrance into the text of bliss as a category. Such an interpretation sees *Mantissa* as a novel that also functions as criticism, providing an insight into what Roland Barthes called the "text of bliss," which is "outside of criticism, unless it is reached through another text of bliss" (*PT*, p. 22).

Fowles transforms this into allegory when Erato and Miles identify storytelling with sexual intercourse (*M*, p. 72), and she attaches a different sexual position to each letter of the alphabet (*M*, p. 82), which may be Fowles's deft analogy to the alphabetical arrangement of *The Pleasure of the Text*. The huge number of sexual positions they have tried, and that they plan to try, represents the infinite variety of

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narrative courses open to the author as he or she faces the terror of the blank page: "You know, it can be constant, even rather frightening, because you write every word, you have a hundred—or at least three—choices, anyway," says Fowles in the Romano interview (*CJF*, p. 40). At the height of their union, the walls of the hospital room become transparent and people outside, in the position of readers looking into the author's head, can see the moment when the author's "presentation self" is grappling with his "inspiration"—as private and, in the post-structuralist parlance, as sexual a moment as Miles and Erato's mutual orgasm.¹¹

Most importantly, the creative self dominates. When Miles discovers that Erato is the author of *The Odyssey*, a work he can never hope to equal, he concedes her complete artistic ascendancy (*M*, p. 171). And despite Miles's claim to be cured, she simply knocks him into a syncope with a blow to the jaw, or eludes his lunge so that he knocks himself out; she resumes her shape as Dr. A. Delphie, and continues her sexual "treatment" of his amnesia. Within the sexual rhythm between Miles and Erato, each time Miles relapses into unconsciousness, Fowles says that Miles drops into a "syncope," a word which has a medical and a grammatical meaning. Medically, the word indicates a break in consciousness caused by the failure of the heart's action; grammatically it means a break, a cutting short, an abbreviation, contraction, or sudden cessation or interruption. Fowles may again be absurdly fitting *Mantissa* to Barthes who connects the "physics of bliss" to "the groove, the inscription, the syncope" (*PT*, p. 42). In the syncopes, Miles does not cede his autonomy to an entity outside himself called language, but to Erato, who is, ultimately, a forgotten part of himself—and this is the point of Fowles's allegory, the workings of which we can understand through the paradigm that has two parts: delay and refutation.

The allegorical impact of *Mantissa* has a delayed effect in the book because Fowles has established the apparent setting as a hospital room, but the room's domed shaped and bumpy padding reveal its allegorical location as the inside of a writer's skull. This is an appropriate place for an allegory of the process of invention, as its analogy with Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* suggests. In Beckett's play, two high windows suggest the interior of a skull and the action revolves around a story that is always nearing its end but never does reach a conclusion. The room in *Mantissa* is lined with gray corrugations that Miles eventually identifies as standing for the gray matter of the human brain (*M*, p. 116, p. 125).¹² Present from the beginning as the reader sees in retrospect, the

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skull/brain context is a fecund cavity for an allegory on the creative process.

The allegorical implications of the skull setting emerge in an aesthetic context when Miles tries, unsuccessfully, to walk out on Erato, whom he considers "essentially a mere call girl" (*M*, p. 123). In the episode Erato says, "You can't walk out of your own brain" (*M*, p. 125). First she makes the door and his clothes disappear, and when the door reappears, "All stands as in a mirror, or a Magritte." He can only respond, "Ridiculous" (*M*, p. 129). "Magritte's strategy," says yet another post-structuralist theorist, Michel Foucault, in *This Is Not a Pipe*, is to deploy "largely familiar images, but images whose recognizability is immediately subverted and rendered moot by 'impossible,' 'irrational,' or 'senseless' conjunctions."¹³ The scene in *Mantissa* reverses this process; the reader's shock comes from realizing that the items so gradually introduced by Fowles—a man in "a borrowed woman's purple bathrobe that is too small for him," a naked woman who is supposed to be a minor Greek deity, and a cuckoo clock with a pseudo-Grecian garment hanging ludicrously from it—are actually in improbable juxtaposition, "like in a Magritte." As with the painter, Fowles's shock induces a laugh, followed by an independent seeing. The laugh is partly on post-structuralist theory, a laugh that is the essence of the allegory's comic contradiction of contemporary theory; and by delaying recognition, Fowles makes it a laugh of insight.

The delay allows Fowles to establish a dialogue with contemporary criticism before the refutational implications of the allegory become clear. To be like Roland Barthes' writer, Miles Green would have to be "the blind spot of systems, adrift"; for Barthes, the writer "is the joker in the pack, the mana, a degree zero, the dummy in the bridge game" (*PT*, pp. 34–35). Just such a writer is Miles Green. In Part One of *Mantissa*, Miles Green—who is being treated for amnesia—stares uncomprehendingly at a nurse's cradling arms; she shows him a manuscript the way a maternity ward nurse shows a newborn infant to its mother who has been unconscious at its birth (*M*, p. 44). When the nurse reads a few words, the "baby" turns out to be *Mantissa*, the writing of which, in line with contemporary theories that assign the author little or no importance, Miles has forgotten. Miles Green's total lack of memory of anything before this "birth" connects to a passage in Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author" in which Barthes claims that "the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text," and is "in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing," and the author "is not the subject with the book as predicate."¹⁴ The birth scene

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works better if the reader is still ignorant of the skull location; Fowles creates an enigma that the reader solves with dawning recognition of the allegorical location.

A similar delayed reaction also characterizes the dialectic structure of Fowles's argument with theory; *Mantissa*'s characters first state a position about the source of literary creativity equivalent to the contemporary critic's; this statement is then refuted by an aspect of the novel's structure or by a second statement that carries the logic to the next step, reveals its absurdity, and so discredits it. For example, "At a certain level," says Miles Green, in what Harold Fawcett calls a "crypto-Derridean" comment, "there is in any case no connection between author and text. . . . The deconstructivists have proved that beyond a shadow of a doubt" (*M*, p. 119).¹⁵ While a wide variety of quotes from Jacques Derrida could be brought forward as examples to illustrate Miles's statement, the following from *Writing and Difference* might be accepted as typical:

Furtiveness—in Latin—is the manner of the thief, who must act very quickly in order to steal from me the words which I have found . . . must purloin them before I have even found them, I am certain that I have always already been divested of them. . . . As soon as I speak, the words I have found (as soon as they are words) no longer belong to me.¹⁶

Miles continues that the author "has no more significant status than the bookshop assistant or the librarian who hands the text *qua* object to the reader" (*M*, p. 119).

The delayed reaction works like an actor's double take; in his second statement, Miles goes beyond what Derrida says, but Miles's statement expresses the next logical stage of Derrida's argument. And in fact Derrida does quote Antonin Artaud on the necessity to renounce "the theatrical superstition of the text and the dictatorship of the writer" in a context that implies Derrida's approval.¹⁷ Embedding the conversation literally within a skull and figuratively within the allegorical structure, Fowles demonstrates the absurdity of his character's words in the novel's concrete context. When he makes this concept concrete, Fowles not only demonstrates its absurdity but also its inconsequentiality, which may account for his title, and for his waiting until near the end of the book to define it.

In delaying the definition of his title, Fowles hints that *Mantissa* is a novelist's reductio ad absurdum reply to contemporary critics who reduce the author's role in creating the text to an inconsequentiality. Fowles overtly defines "mantissa" as "an addition of comparatively small

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importance, especially to a literary effort or discourse," but the reader receives this information only after forming a similar opinion of *Mantissa*. The allegorical insight opens a second possibility. While Fowles quotes the obsolete sense of the word "mantissa" from the *Oxford English Dictionary* in a footnote, he omits that same source's entry for the word's operative meaning: the decimal point in a mathematical logarithm (*M*, p. 188).¹⁸

The first definition expresses the insignificant role in which contemporary critical theory casts the author. Miles says that contemporary theorists have proved that the author's role is purely "fortuitous and agential," in possible parody of the way Barthes entertains the possibility that the author is the "full subject" of the act of writing, but then, citing Jacques Lacan, concludes that "structural analysis is unwilling to accept such an assumption: *who speaks* (in the narrative) is not *who writes* (in real life) and *who writes* is not *who is*."¹⁹ "Who speaks?" In *Écrits*, Jacques Lacan says that "truth" alone answers "I speak," and Lacan says that there is "no speech that is not language."²⁰ Like Fowles and his character, Jane Gallop interprets Lacan here to mean that "only language speaks."²¹ In developing Lacan's idea, Barthes is more radical even than Tzvetan Todorov, who says, "The *I* in the novel is not the *I* of discourse, that is, the subject of the speech act."²²

The result is a conditional proposition that only gradually assumes importance to the reader: if the author does not exist, then it would make no sense to say that one book by this author is more (or less) significant than any other. Thus Fowles cleverly makes the reader's own initial sense of *Mantissa* as a mantissa into an argument against the post-structuralist dissolving of the author. This theory of the author, in making a human being completely disappear, has created an absurdity. For Barthes, in the conscious mind, the writer is "a creature of language . . . never anything but a plaything" of "the language that constitutes him" (*PT*, p. 34). The "unconscious," says Lacan, "is the discourse of the other. . . . It is the discourse of the circuit in which I am integrated. I am one of its links."²³ If the writer is made up of consciousness and the unconscious, then the entire creature, the writer, is language. Significantly, Barthes accepts Jacques Lacan's notion that the unconscious is a system of writing, and thus has the structure of human language. Barthes says, "As institution, the author is dead: his civil status, his biographical person have disappeared" (*PT*, p. 27). Todorov expresses the idea only a bit less radically: "Man has constituted himself out of language, as the

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philosophers of our century have so often observed, and we are likely to discover its schema in all our social activity.”²⁴

The discourse-oriented definition of *Mantissa* implies a light, comic addition to the continuing discourse that is Fowles’s work, of little importance compared to his major novels. In its mathematical sense, the title suggests Fowles’s regret at the increasing transfer of creative energy from art to rational theorizing about art; the work of fiction looks unimportant, just as the decimal looks small compared to the numerals in a logarithm, but its position gives it complete leverage over the meaning of the expression, which is exactly what happens with allegory in this novel. These lines of thought from Barthes, Lacan, and Todorov fit, but fit absurdly, with Miles Green’s sneers to Erato.

Mr. Green’s contemptuous, condescending tone becomes part of the second half of the allegorical paradigm: refutation. When Erato asks why, then, “writers still put their names on the title page,” the author-character written by John Fowles replies, “because most of them are like you. Quite incredibly behind the times. And hair-raisingly vain. Most of them are still under the positively medieval illusion that they write their own books” (*M*, p. 119). Miles’s openly unfair tone fits with Barthes’ ridicule of the author who thinks he must “delay and indefinitely ‘polish’ his form”: “Having buried the Author,” the modern “scriptor” can thus no longer believe “the pathetic view of their predecessors,” that the hand that writes “is too slow for his thought or passion” (*DA*, p. 146). And later in “The Death of the Author,” Barthes insists that what occurs is “a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression),” which “traces a field without origin,” or which at least, “has no other origin than language itself, language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins” (*DA*, p. 146). And incidentally, for Barthes, the same is true of the reader, and hence of the critic: “This ‘I’ which approaches the text is already itself a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite or, more precisely, lost (whose origin is lost).”²⁵ In parallel, Fowles’s Erato raises the issue of the origin of Miles Green, putative author of *Mantissa*, bringing us to the discrepancies.

The allegorical dimension of his characters’ dialogue continues the refutation aspect of the allegorical paradigm; by this dialogue, Fowles demonstrates that an element is missing in the interpretation of Miles Green as an author, an omission that further parodically demonstrates the absurdity of post-structuralist theory in Fowles’s allegory. After complaining of her helplessness as a character in Miles’s book, the Muse Erato challenges Miles: “To say nothing of *your* character. I notice there is not a word about his exceedingly dubious status. I wonder who’s

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pulling *his* strings?" Rather than saying language is, Miles, the writer born simultaneously with the text, replies, "I am. I'm me. Don't be ridiculous." But he cannot answer Erato's smiling questions: "Then why's he being referred to as 'he' throughout? What are you trying to hide?" (*M*, p. 88). The answer, "John Fowles," necessarily supplied by the reader, is the punch line of Fowles's allegorical joke.

A similar discrepancy reveals how Fowles's allegorical action contradicts contemporary theory when the characters speak directly about it. Lording his intelligence over Erato, Miles says, "You'll be telling me next you've never heard of Todorov," and he asks in rhetorical exasperation, "how can one possibly discuss theory with you when you haven't even read the basic texts?" (*M*, p. 116). Offering to explain "in simple laymen's terms," he continues with a statement that includes "hypostatic and epiphanic *facies*, of the diegetic process" and especially, he says, "in terms of the anagnorosis" (*M*, p. 116). Knowing the post-structuralist vocabularies gives Miles an apparent advantage over Erato, who supposedly relies on enthusiasm—for both sexuality and fiction; but Miles's advantage is only an apparent one.

That the theoretician has only an illusory advantage over the artist is further confirmed by the refutation side of the paradigm of the allegorical strategy of *Mantissa*: allegorical action refutes the words of Miles, the spokesman of contemporary theory. Miles looks foolish when Erato applies the term "anagnorosis" correctly to the reversal point in the plot in *Mantissa*, supporting her earlier claim that the role-playing is all over now, "the pretending I haven't even heard of Tzvetan Todorov and hermeneutics and diegesis and deconstructivism" (*M*, p. 139). Miles had not mentioned Todorov's first name, so we can conclude that the Muse does know theory, but chooses intuitive inspiration.

By comic discrepancy, *Mantissa* also contradicts Barthes, who said that the text of bliss "could not be written" (*PT*, p. 34). On page 183, Miles calls *Mantissa* "what would have been, if this wasn't an unwritable non-text, one hundred and eighty-three pages at least" (*M*, p. 183). The reader's reaction to Miles's "would-have-been" epitomizes the second half of the allegorical paradigm—Fowles's strategy of contradicting theory by narrative allegory—for the reader holds the supposedly unwritable, non-text book in her or his hands, demonstrating the absurdity of any such concept. Instead, a written text actually exists: the product of a process that Fowles depicts allegorically as the sexual union of Miles and Erato, the union of the creative artist's public and secret selves.

In total effect, the narrative depiction of an Erato as a lively, animated, but essentially brainless young woman is contradicted by the

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allegory in which she is not only an essential element of literary creation but the dominant partner. To Erato's mother Mnemosyne (memory) "is ascribed the art of reasoning and giving suitable names to everything, so we can describe them, and converse about them without seeing them," as Fowles reminds us by his epigram from Lemprière (*M*, p. 47). While accepting Mnemosyne's traits as valuable, Fowles's allegorical structure in *Mantissa* allows him to demonstrate two points—that these traits are neither the only valuable human attributes, nor are they sufficient in themselves to generate literary invention. Thus, when Fowles parodies our modern philosophers in *Mantissa*, he transcends parody by re-crafting the post-structuralist sexual theory of the text into his own demonstrated sexual allegory of the creative process; by so doing, John Fowles has fashioned a text that is more than a mantissa.

¹ John Fowles, "An Interview with John Fowles," interview with Carol M. Barnum, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 31 (Spring 1985), 198.

² Of course this John Fowles is the implied author, not the real author, to use a standard distinction of narrative theory. Fowles overtly inserts himself into *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, and so such a device is not foreign to him.

³ Gerald Bruns, *Inventions* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1982), p. 164.

⁴ John Fowles, "A Conversation with John Fowles," interview with Carlin Romano, *Boulevard: Journal of Contemporary Writing*, 2 (Spring 1987), 42. Hereafter cited in the text as *CJF*.

⁵ Philip Thody, introd. to *Criticism and Truth* (1966) by Roland Barthes, trans. Katherine Pilcher Keuneman (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 11.

⁶ John Fowles, *Mantissa* (Boston: Little, 1982), p. 63. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *M*.

⁷ See the entry for "Old Uncle Tom Cobbleigh" in Ivor H. Evans, ed., *Brewer's Dictionary of Fable and Phrase*, Centenary Ed., Revised (New York: Harper, 1981), p. 1149.

⁸ If this novel is not a pure allegory of the novelist's psychic process, its characters at least have semiallegorical status; the book is an allegory transformed, in Fowles's typical fashion, into his unique personal form—in the sense that *The Collector* can be thought of as a thriller transformed, and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* a historical novel transformed. *Mantissa* plays with a set of conventions, opening them out to leave room for Fowles's scope.

⁹ *Adelphi* is a comedy by the Latin writer Terence, based on a lost Greek model, in which the son of a wealthy man falls in love with a slave dancing girl, possibly a model for Fowles's Erato; see Sir Paul Harvey, *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1984), p. 5. Delphi, of course, is the city on the slopes of Mount Parnassus, home of Apollo and the Muses; the cave-shrine there was called "the navel of the world"; see Lillian Feder, *Crowell's Handbook of Classical Literature* (New York: Lippincott, 1964), pp. 112–13.

¹⁰ Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (1978), trans. Richard Miller

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(New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p. 6. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *PT*. Interestingly, neither Barthes nor Fowles italicizes the title *Kama Sutra*.

¹¹ The transparent wall perhaps comes from Barthes' question, "How can we read criticism?" and his answer, "I can make myself a voyeur . . . I enter perversion" (*Pleasure of the Text*, p. 17). Barthes says that "criticism is always historical or prospective" (*ibid.*, p. 22), and the most persistent voyeur in *Mantissa* is Clio, Muse of History, who is "Staff Sister" or head nurse at the hospital and, in another admitted pun, Erato's sister.

¹² Further support for *Mantissa* as an allegory of the creative process comes from the book's beginning with a sequence that is closely reminiscent of Samuel Beckett's opening lines in *Company*, Beckett's prose-poem commentary on the creative process. A sequence is structured, in both instances, by a progression of pronouns to reflect a coming-to-awareness: it, I, you, but not "we" (*Mantissa*, pp. 3-4). Beckett's character in *Company* never trusts his experience of the "other," and thus cannot accept the pronoun "we"; Fowles establishes this pronoun, but all the "others" turn out to be the character's own literary creations or else they are forgotten parts of himself. See Samuel Beckett, *Company* (New York: Grove Press, 1980), pp. 7-8.

¹³ Michel Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe* (1973), trans. James Harkness (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1983), p. 8.

¹⁴ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author" (1968), in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 145. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *DA*.

¹⁵ Harold W. Fawkner, *The Timescapes of John Fowles* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press; and London: Associated University Presses, 1984), p. 133. Fawkner does not specify which aspects of Derrida are in question; other analyses of *Mantissa* identify its connection to Derrida or deconstructivism but also do not cite particular passages from critical theory; see Drury Pifer, "The Muse Abused: Deconstruction in *Mantissa*," in *Critical Essays on John Fowles*, ed. Ellen Pifer (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1986), pp. 162-76; and Raymond Wilson's entry on Fowles in *Contemporary Authors*, New Revision Series 25, ed. Hal May and Deborah A. Straub (Detroit: Gale, 1989), pp. 140-41.

¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (1967), trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 187. While numerous statements in *Mantissa* have fairly close verbal parallels to the particular post-structuralist comments with which I match them, Fowles probably was parodying broad categories of statements that are found again and again in post-structuralist theory.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

¹⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary: The Compact Edition*, I, Complete Text Reproduced Micrographically (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), p. 1720.

¹⁹ Roland Barthes, "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives" (1966), in *Image-Music-Text*, pp. 111-12.

²⁰ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* (1966), trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), p. 125.

²¹ Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985), p. 40.

²² Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose* (1971), trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1988), p. 27.

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²³ Jacques Lacan, *Seminars*, trans. Silvana Tomaselli and John Forrester (New York: Norton, 1988), Book II, p. 89.

²⁴ Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, p. 19.

²⁵ Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (1970), trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p. 10.

Modes of Return: Memory and Remembering in the Poetry of Robert Lowell

ALLAN JOHNSTON

In *The Poetic Art of Robert Lowell*, Marjorie Perloff suggests that the “dark night” of “Skunk Hour” is “the central experience which Lowell’s self undergoes.”¹ Especially in his more “confessional” sequences, Lowell concentrates his poetry in on his self, exploring tensions built up in his psyche through formative experience. “My mind’s not right,” he declares in “Skunk Hour.” His attempts to determine why his mind is “not right” express themselves as a series of spirals back into self to retrieve and rethink experience.

But since Lowell sees mind as the “animator of the actual,”² recollection for him restructures meaning in the events that form the psyche. Each recollection changes an event’s relations to the present, to experiences gained between recollections, and to knowledge acquired through previous recalls of the event. These shifts within recollections reflect Lowell’s changing perceptions of the nature of memory itself. If in *Life Studies*³ he describes memory as presenting “solid” or “fixed” representations of the past, by the time of the poems in *Day by Day* he has concluded that “the past changes more than the present.”⁴

In fact, Lowell’s spiraling in and out of self eventually brings him to deny the fixity of memory. This altered perspective on the nature of memory seems directly connected to a resolution of the oedipal structures he expresses in his poems. This resolution, in turn, is exposed through shifts in Lowell’s psychic models of his parents. Such shifts, as we will see through analyzing passages from *Life Studies*, *Notebook 1967–68*,⁵ *History*,⁶ and *Day by Day*, seem to point to an effort to

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escape fixation on the past by entering a state of present-centeredness in which, paradoxically, Lowell perceives acceptance of death as ultimately life-affirming.

Life Studies was the first book in which Lowell waxed overtly autobiographical. Though he included incidents from his life in earlier poems, these incidents were deflected from psychological terms into cosmic dramas reflecting his Catholicism. Only in *Life Studies* do we get dramas directly fixed on the interior, cathartic revelations about self and family that lead to such condemnations as "my mind's not right" and "I myself am hell."

However, as the "hell" in the last quote intimates, *Life Studies* is not removed from a religious context. Lowell himself saw these poems as "more religious than the early ones" and felt they involved "the same sort of thing that went into the religious poems—the same sort of struggle, light and darkness, the flux of experience."⁷ These perceptions become significant when we view the mode of remembering Lowell presents in *Life Studies*. In "91 Revere Street," recalling the portrait of Mordecai Myers that hung in his childhood home, Lowell states that

out of my memory I often come on it in the setting of our Revere Street house, a setting now fixed in the mind, where it survives all the distortions of fantasy, all the blank befogging of forgetfulness. There, the vast number of remembered things remains rocklike. Each is in its place, each has its function, its history, its drama. There, all is preserved by that motherly care that one either ignored or resented in his youth. The things and their owners come back urgent with life and meaning—because finished, they are durable and perfect. (*LS*, pp. 12–13)

It has often been pointed out that Lowell monumentalizes his past in *Life Studies* by converting familial and personal experience into a mythology. This mythologizing requires an objectification of experience through setting self off from the events that constitute self, thereby making them "rocklike," "urgent with life and meaning," and "durable and perfect." However, by rendering events "durable and perfect," Lowell in fact cancels out the "flux of experience" that he felt lay in the poems. In effect, *Life Studies* presents us with sets of discrete, characteristic descriptions, as when in "Commander Lowell" we learn that Lowell's mother's voice was "electric / with a hysterical, unmarried panic"; that Lowell's father "showed up on the golf course, / wearing a blue serge jacket and numbly cut / white ducks he'd bought / at a Pearl

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Harbor commissariat"; that he "hummed 'Anchors aweigh' in the tub" (*LS*, pp. 70-71). What strikes us about these descriptions is their repeatability or typicality—none of them suggests a highly signifiable or historical event, but rather they all seem to exist in a timeless possibility of repetition.

Mircea Eliade says in *The Myth of the Eternal Return* that "the abolition of time" occurs in part "through the . . . repetition of paradigmatic gestures."⁸ He spells out the means by which such abolition is achieved:

through . . . imitation, man is projected into the mythical epoch in which the archetypes were first revealed. Thus we perceive . . . [that] insofar as an act (or an object) acquires a certain reality through the repetition of certain paradigmatic gestures, and acquires it through that alone, there is an implicit abolition of profane time, of duration, of "history"; and he who reproduces the exemplary gesture thus finds himself transported into the mythical epoch in which its revelation took place. (p. 35)

If *Life Studies* represents Lowell's private mythology, the psychic content embedded in the work attains significance at two levels: first, through its implicit "perfect" repetition in a "mythological" past, and second, through Lowell's repetition of it in the present, a repeating free from the "distortions of fantasy" and the "befogging of forgetfulness." By both his selection of events and his manner of presenting them, then, Lowell aims at immortality, an "implicit abolition of profane time, of duration, of 'history.'"

Lowell's ossification of experience in *Life Studies* recalls the description of sublimation Norman O. Brown gives in *Life against Death*, a work that may have influenced Lowell when he wrote "For the Union Dead."⁹ Brown points out that "the basic characteristic of sublimation is the desexualization of sexual energy by its redirection. . . . New objects must substitute for the human body, and there is no sublimation without the projection of the human body into things."¹⁰ In *Life Studies*, however, sublimation extends beyond the "things" which often come to embody personality. The things themselves are gone, but the desexualized *memory* of things is "rocklike" and "survives all the distortions of fantasy, all the blank befogging of forgetfulness" through being "preserved by . . . motherly care." The objects imbued with meaning in this motherly preservation become immaterial through their re-creation as memory, but this re-creation eternalizes the past in the present and fills the rememberer—Lowell—with immortality.

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In effect, then, remembering becomes a revolt against death, a bid for immortality. As Brown puts it:

[man's] incapacity to die [or in other words to face the reality of his encroaching death] . . . throws mankind out of the actuality of living, which for all normal animals is at the same time dying; the result is denial of life (repression). The incapacity to accept death turns the death instinct into its distinctively human and distinctively morbid form. The distraction of human life to the war against death . . . results in death's dominion over life. The war against death takes the form of a preoccupation with the past and the future, and the present tense, the tense of life, is lost—that present which Whitehead says "holds within itself the complete sum of existence, backwards and forwards, that whole amplitude of time, which is eternity." (LAD, p. 284)

Lowell's bid for immortality locates him in the nexus of the oedipal complex as Brown describes it, and his subsequent efforts to escape from oedipal domination may explain the importance Brown later held for him. Brown suggests that the oedipal "project" is "the *causa sui* (father-of-onself) project, and therefore in essence a revolt against death generally, and specifically against the biological principle separating mother and child" (LAD, p. 127). Lowell's concept of memory, wherein "all is preserved by . . . motherly care," suggests a direct connection between "endurable and perfect" memory and maternal protection.

That Lowell's stance in *Life Studies* is primarily oedipal in Brown's sense of the term becomes evident in the portrait Lowell gives of his parents through this work. In "91 Revere Street," where he first presents his family, Lowell states "I was a churlish, disloyal, romantic boy . . . quite without hero worship for my father, whose actuality seemed so inferior to the photographs in uniform he once mailed us from the Golden Gate" (LS, p. 13). He views his father as "rather truculently democratic in what might be defined as an upper middle-class, naval, and Masonic fashion," a "mumbler" whose opinions are "almost morbidly hesitant" though he "considered himself a matter-of-fact man of science and had an unspoiled faith in the superior efficiency of northern nations" (LS, p. 16). These belittling depictions of Lowell's father clearly connect with the reductive vision of the father required by the oedipal project.

Later, Lowell focuses on his father's furnishings:

The walls of Father's minute Revere Street den-parlor were bare and white. His bookshelves were bare and white. The den's one adornment was a ten-tube home-assembled battery radio set,

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whose loudspeaker had the shape and color of a Mexican sombrero. . . .

My father's favorite piece of den furniture was his oak and "rhinoceros hide" armchair. It was ostentatiously a masculine, or rather a bachelor's chair. It had a notched, adjustable back; it was black, cracked, hacked, scratched, splintered, gouged, initialed, gunpowder-charred and tumbler-ringed. . . . Father loved each disfigured inch. (LS, p. 17)

Lowell's attention to furnishings here becomes a key to personality presentation. The "bare and white" bookshelves suggest the intellectual barrenness of the man whom Lowell thought "had reached, perhaps, his final mental possibilities" by the time he graduated from Annapolis. The "bachelor's chair" hints at the conjugal emptiness of a man "deep . . . with the dumb depth of one who trusted in statistics and was dubious of personal experience." After quitting the Navy, Lowell's father becomes "literally that old cliché, a fish out of water." And as "91 Revere Street" progresses, Lowell's father does indeed get reduced to a number of clichés; his conversation fills with hackneyed naval jargon suggesting shallowness and impotence.

Set against Lowell's father is Lowell's mother, a woman who dreams of heroes and sees her husband as "savorless, unmasterful, merely considerate" (LS, p. 18). As the father is defined through clichés and objects, the mother seems defined through contradiction. "Fully conscious of her uniqueness and normality," she operates, probably unconsciously, under the double standard of her "Freudian Papa": "A man must make up his own mind. O Bob, if you are ever going to resign, do it now so I can at least plan for your son's survival and education on a single continent" (LS, pp. 19–20).

She is antisocial, a "very authentic, human, and plausible difficulty" that stems from her lack of self-assurance and need "to feel liked, admired, surrounded by the approved and familiar" (LS, p. 32). Though her attacks on her husband's friends are brutal enough to make her fear "being crushed by her own massively intimidating offensive," she tends toward the "chic, romantic, impulsive" (LS, p. 33).

Lowell's characterization of his mother is clearly ambiguous. Her portrayal seems laced with unresolved feelings that suggest the dynamic created in oedipal repression. This becomes especially significant when we consider Brown's contention that "the Oedipal project is . . . a product of the conflict of ambivalence" (LAD, p. 118) resulting from separation from the mother and involving "an attempt to overcome that conflict by narcissistic inflation" (LAD, p. 118), by means of which the

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child tries to become its own progenitor. At the peak of the oedipal project, the castration complex causes the child to turn from the mother and strive for individuation. But this turning, according to Brown, occurs without necessary reference to the "castrating father," since "the castration complex and all the far-reaching consequences attributed to it by psychoanalysis rest ultimately on the child's relation to the mother" (*LAD*, p. 124). "All . . . ambivalent relations toward the father . . . can also develop in relation to the mother" (*LAD*, p. 124).

In these features of the oedipal project we see the extent to which Lowell's seeming obfuscation of his mother reflects oedipal relation. Lowell tells us that the word "Boy . . . meant weakness, outlawry, and yet was a status to be held onto" (*LS*, p. 25). This "outlaw" status, of course, assures proximity to the mother, yet is mitigated by the danger Lowell senses in its retention: reassimilation into the feminine through castration. Part of the tension created by this cross of desire and danger is released through sublimation. If Lowell loves toy soldiers so much that he tricks a friend out of a collection of "hand-painted solid lead soldiers made to order in Dijon, France" (*LS*, p. 14), we can only connect this love to an "outlaw" love for the mother expressed through shared passion. "My real *love*, as Mother used to insist to all new visitors, was toy soldiers" (*LS*, p. 13), Lowell tells us. But behind this love lies the mother's own love for the martial: "Mother seemed almost light-headed when she retold the romance of Sarah Bernhardt in *L'Aiglon*, the Eaglet, the weakling! She would speak the word *weakling* with such amused vehemence that I formed a grandiose and false image of L'Aiglon's Father, the *big Napoleon* . . ." (*LS*, p. 18).

The "blend of the feminine and the military" (*LS*, p. 25) so obvious in "91 Revere Street" appears mostly in Lowell's recollections of Brimmer School, with its "swept and garnished *barrack-room* camaraderie of the older girls' gymnasium exercises" (*LS*, p. 26; my italics) and tramping "azamsons" (*LS*, p. 27). "In comparison such masculine displays as trips to battle cruisers commanded by comrades of my father seemed eyewash" (*LS*, p. 27). However, the nexus of this blending, and of the contrast between the weak, "naval" masculine realm and the infantry-like columns of azamsons, rests in Lowell's image of his mother. Putting aside her love of the Napoleonic, we see this blending in Lowell's descriptions of her. "Hysterical even in her calm" in fights with her husband, she remains "a patient and forbearing *strategist*" while pretending "neutrality" (*LS*, p. 19; my italics). Watching these fights, Lowell would "ambuscade [himself] behind the banister" (*LS*, p. 19). In her forcefulness Lowell's mother would come on so strongly that "she

feared being crushed by her own massively intimidating *offensive*" (LS, p. 32; my italics).

The martial elements in these descriptions point to the extent of Lowell's intimidation. We can even speculate that if Lowell's mother, as presented, reminds us of "the big Napoleon," Lowell himself would appear to be "*L'Aiglon*, the Eaglet, the weakling" (LS, p. 18) who attempts to emulate or "absorb" her power through his "*real* love . . . toy soldiers." This sublimation allows him to remain an "outlaw" even when this status appears as rebellion against the mother:

There was a gloating panic in [Lowell's mother's] voice that showed she enjoyed the drama of talking to Admiral De Stahl. "Sir," she shrilled, "you have compelled my husband to leave me alone and defenseless on Christmas Eve!" She ran into my bedroom. She hugged me. She said, "Oh Bobby, it's such a comfort to have a man in the house." "I am not a man," I said, "I am a boy." (LS, p. 24)

More than an "outlaw" status is at stake, however. Through the sexual ambivalence by means of which strong, "soldierly" women preside over weak "naval" men in "91 Revere Street," Lowell's very sexuality is called into question. Nowhere is this more obvious than in a passage in which Lowell's mother questions him:

I used to enjoy dawdling and humming "Anchors Aweigh" up Revere Street after a day at school. "Anchors Aweigh," the official Navy song, had originally been the song composed for my father's class. And yet my mind always blanked and *seemed to fill with a clammy hollowness* when mother asked *prying* questions. . . . "What have you been doing, Bobby?" Mother would ask. "I haven't," I'd answer. . . . I thus saved myself from emotional exhaustion. (LS, p. 20; my italics)

Lowell's seeming identification with his father here collapses with the not-so-veiled sexual reversal, in which the mother's "prying" questions enter the "clammy hollowness" of Lowell's mind. This reversal fulfills the oedipal project while at the same time inverting it and bringing forth its moment of crisis—the castration complex. In this passage, in fact, we see that cross of resistance and desire (expressed through Lowell's usurpation of his father's class song) which will result in "emotional exhaustion."¹¹ If for Brown, however, "the essence of the castration complex" lies in "[apprehending] the mother in terms of sexual differentiation, as castrated" (*LAD*, p. 123), here gender confusion results in a portrayal of the mother not as castrated, but as castrating—as in fact assuming the masculine role while "forcing" her

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questions on the boy. Lowell's defensive nonanswer saves him from "emotional exhaustion," yet leaves unimpeded the ambiguous sexuality shown throughout "91 Revere Street." Thus the piece reveals a failure to resolve the oedipal complex.

The poems in part four, section one, of *Life Studies* further the portrait we get of Lowell's parents in "91 Revere Street" and lend support to an oedipal reading of the entire cycle. In "Commander Lowell" the mother's voice is "electric / with a hysterical, *unmarried* panic," while the father is feminized through being described as "cheerful and *cowed*" (*LS*, pp. 70–71; my italics). In the poems from "Commander Lowell" to "Father's Bedroom," Lowell again reduces his father to a series of stale phrases and objects. In "Commander Lowell" he tells us that "having a naval officer / for my Father was nothing to shout / about" and that the people at Mattapoisett "wrote [father] off as 'naval,' / naturally supposed his sport was sailing" (*LS*, pp. 70–71). These clichéd responses to Lowell's father set us up for the father's own clichés:

"Anchors aweigh," Daddy boomed in his bathtub,
 "Anchors aweigh,"
 When Lever Brothers offered to pay
 him double what the Navy paid.
 ("Commander Lowell," *LS*, p. 71)

The childlike rhymes underscore the father's naive optimism concerning his change in life. His subsequent business failure points the way to the hackneyed terms in "Terminal Days at Beverly Farms": "little black *Chevie*," "buccaneer," "king's ransom," "the commander of the Swiss Navy." In this poem, as in "Commander Lowell," Lowell pays a great deal of attention to dress, suggesting the (interestingly military) cliché that "clothes make the man" and hence further denigrating his father's status. Moreover, in these poems we see a growing association of the father with objects: "little black *Chevie*," "'calc' and 'trig' books / . . . clipper ship statistics, / . . . ivory slide rule" (*LS*, p. 74). In "Terminal Days at Beverly Farms" these objects are linked with similes suggesting violence and disease; the "*Chevie*" is "garaged like a sacrificial steer" and the house is located so that the parents

had no sea-view,
 but sky-blue tracks of the commuters' railroad shone
 like a double-barrelled shotgun
 through the scarlet late August sumac,
 multiplying like cancer

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at their garden's border.

(“Terminal Days at Beverly Farms,” *LS*, p. 73)

After a clichéd presentation of his father’s death (“I feel awful”), Lowell completes the reduction of his father in the poem “Father’s Bedroom.” Here we get straightforward description of the father’s effects. If Lowell’s memory of his father here is “endurable and perfect,” it is because the father has been totally dehumanized, turned into objects and worn phrases, essentially removed from a position of rivalry. We are left with the only significant thing Lowell ever saw in his father—that he was once far away, “on the Yangtze River, China” (*LS*, p. 75).

Lowell’s treatment of his mother in “Sailing Home from Rapallo” and “During Fever” shares the ambiguity established in “91 Revere Street.” In these poems, however, we find more direct suggestions of an oedipal urge underlying this ambiguity. The misspelling of the mother’s name on her coffin—“LOVEL”—suggests both *love* and *level*. Lowell’s oedipal love for his mother may be “leveled” or sublimated into hero worship (Lowell memorizes the names of French generals after his mother has “read to me from the Napoleon book” [*LS*, p. 70], and Lowell himself chose her Napoleonic coffin) and debunking his father, a potential rival for her love. Though Lowell states that “tears ran down my cheeks” when he went to Italy to recover her body, he never reveals his feelings for her, as he does, for instance, for his grandfather in “Grandparents.” Instead, after an emotional outburst—“Mother, Mother!” (*LS*, p. 79)—he recalls how “we bent by the fire / rehashing Father’s character” (*LS*, p. 79), a joy he describes as “unadulterated.” When he details his mother’s effects, he addresses her directly rather than flatly describing objects as in “Father’s Bedroom.” This shows a familiarity he never displays in speaking of his father.

Moreover, the descriptions Lowell uses in connection with his mother sometimes suggest such infantile, regressive, morbid, or almost perverse associations as are associated with the oedipal project. In “During Fever” Lowell finds his “milk-tooth mug of milk / . . . waiting for me on a plate / of Triskets,” suggesting a need for maternal protection. He also states that his mother’s “nuptial bed / was as big as a bathroom” (*LS*, pp. 79–80), an image suggesting anality and prepubescent sexuality, if not that the sex that took place there was overly “hygienic.” The most striking image comes at the end of “Sailing Home from Rapallo”:

In the grandiloquent lettering on Mother’s coffin,

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Lowell had been misspelled *LOVEL*.

The corpse

was wrapped like *panetone* in Italian tinfoil.

(*LS*, p. 78)

Any pleasant associations conjured by *panetone* sink in the gruesome image of the tinfoil-covered corpse. Beneath the image, though, lies a level of prohibition at which, as Erich Neumann suggests, "the nutritional side is the only important factor. . . . This [alimentary] sphere is still very strongly accentuated for the infantile ego, which regards the maternal uroboros as the source of food and satisfaction. . . . Cannibalism is symptomatic of this state of affairs."¹² Thus, at a pivotal moment in his oedipal crisis—the irrevocable loss of the mother, which seems to lead directly into the mental breakdown Lowell faces in "Waking in the Blue"—Lowell sinks from the sexual level into a sphere where "the visceral psychology of hunger occupies the foreground" (*OHC*, p. 27). The mother, as source of nourishment, becomes a thing to be devoured, and at this "life = power = food" level, Lowell finds the "salvation" (if such we can call it) that awaits him at the end of *Life Studies*. Having concluded that his "mind's not right," Lowell declares

I myself am hell;
nobody's here—

only skunks, that search
in the moonlight for a bite to eat.

("Skunk Hour," *LS*, p. 90)

The skunks—the animal part—"will not scare."¹³ As Lowell wrote later, "the spirit is very willing to give up, / but the body is not weak and will not die" (*DD*, p. 29). *Life Studies* thus moves from a life-denying, sublimated "revolt against death" to the affirmation of "living, which for all normal animals is at the same time dying" (*LAD*, p. 284). But this shift is limited by that "rocklike," "endurable and perfect" re-creation of events in which the remembered event itself becomes the locus of sublimation. As we shall see, Lowell's gradual reductions of the "endurable" aspects of memory reflect a move toward fuller reconciliation of the "oedipal project."

Before assessing Lowell's psychic position toward his parents in *Day by Day*, we must review the eighteen years that separate this book from *Life Studies*. Lowell's parents disappear from his poetry between 1959 and 1967, though one poem in *For the Union Dead*, "Middle Age,"

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explores Lowell's guilt feelings over an act of aggression against his father, a theme Lowell develops in *Notebook 1967–68*. With its biblical overtones, however, this poem avoids directly confronting the experience.

In 1969, Lowell published *Notebook 1967–68*. We find in this work an attempt at reconciliation with the father and a simultaneous effort to break away from the “endurable and perfect” model of memory presented in *Life Studies*. The fluidity of shifts between past and present in *Notebook 1967–68* suggests a mode of remembering that negates fixity through absorbing the past into the present. At the same time Lowell's father becomes a human being whom Lowell can address directly and unaffectedly, without clichés.

Since, as we have seen, the “endurable and perfect” model of memory Lowell presents in *Life Studies* results from a sublimation of memory into the service of the oedipal project, this recasting of both the nature of memory and the image of the father seems to suggest a specific attempt to overthrow oedipal domination. However, this effort was not entirely successful. After *Notebook 1967–68* appeared, Lowell spent four years revising and expanding the book before finally turning it into *History* and *For Lizzie and Harriet*, both published in 1973. These revisions, with their reversion to older models of memory and restructuring of Lowell's relation with his father, suggest a “backsliding” into oedipal structures perhaps resulting from insecurities associated with the reception of these poems.

The revisions show Lowell conscientiously changing the image of his father to an earlier model and attempting to ease the guilt he felt for striking his father over an incident concerning a girlfriend. As an example of the former, between “My Death 2” (*N*, p. 78), a dream-poem in which Lowell speaks to his father, and “Father in a Dream” (*H*, p. 116), the revision of this poem, Lowell alters the image of his father to bring it closer to the image in *Life Studies*, dressing him in his “Sunday white ducks and blue coat,” which makes him seem “more in character than life,” and having him study “calc and Kipling” rather than “music and singing, and my trusty math.” In the revision of “Charles River 4” (*N*, p. 37; Lowell reinstated this version in *Selected Poems*, revised edition) to “Mother and Father 1” (*H*, p. 114); on the other hand, we see Lowell trying to appease the guilt he felt for striking his father and to minimize the suggestion that this guilt is important to his poetry. Lowell does this by altering the poem's time-scape and suggesting in the revision that his apology to his father successfully eased the strain

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between them. Comparing lines from these poems shows the difference:

If the clock had stopped in 1936
for them, or again in '50 and '54—
they are not dead, and not until death parts us,
will I stop sucking my blood from their hurt.

(“Charles River 4,” lines 1–4)

Though the clock half-stopped in 1936
for them, then forever in 50 and 54,
they still are . . . until death stops me too,
and the blood of our spirit is out of mind.

(“Mother and Father 1,” lines 1–4)

The shift from the subjunctive to the limiting sentence adverb “though” brackets Lowell’s parents into the past, limiting their influence on him. The change in line four lessens Lowell’s sense of wrong toward his parents and “sublimates” his use of their injuries in his poetry into spiritual communion. These alterations are important considering the change Lowell makes in the climax of the poem:

I struck my father; later my apology
barely scratched the surface of his invisible
coronary . . . never to be effaced.

(“Charles River 4,” lines 12–14)

I hit my father. My apology
scratched the surface of his invisible
coronary . . . never to be effaced.

(“Mother and Father 1,” lines 12–14)

Removing the word “barely” alters the whole sense of the passage. Though in both cases “never to be effaced” hangs ambiguously on ellipses, in “Charles River 4” we get more the sense that the coronary, which was “barely scratched,” will “never be effaced” from Lowell’s guilt-ridden mind. In “Mother and Father 1,” however, because “barely” is gone, the apology also seems ineffaceable. Lowell seems to be purging his poem of negative connotations, tidying up his relationship with his father by suggesting that things came out all right anyway. He thus denies qualities undesirable to his self-image (“Mother and Father 1,” line 4), reifies his relationship to his father by making his apology effective (“Mother and Father 1,” lines 12–14), and removes his father to the stereotypical pose presented in *Life Studies* (“Father in a Dream”).

As I have suggested, Lowell’s efforts at reconciliation with his father in *Notebook 1967–68* accompany an attempt to come to grips with his experience through moving away from “rocklike” aspects of remember-

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ing. In the revisions, however, this attempted escape turns into an endeavor to gain control over experience in a way similar to what we saw in *Life Studies*. Lowell described *Notebook 1967–68* as “one poem” which “rolls with the seasons.” The separate poems and sections are opportunist and inspired by impulse. “Accident threw up subjects, and the plot swallowed them—famished for human chances” (*N*, p. 159). The emphases on accident and impulse suggest Lowell’s intention, to “create nothing less than an epic of his own consciousness,” a poem “inspired by impulse” but ‘armed with purpose’ [which] would enable him ‘to describe the immediate present,’ an instant in which political and personal happenings interacted with a lifetime’s accumulation of memories, dreams, and knowledge.”¹⁴

However, the book received mixed reviews, and even favorable critics were bewildered by it. Lowell’s rendering of this “poem” into *History* and *For Lizzie and Harriet* places these poems in a historical, rather than personal, chronology. As Steven Axelrod points out in *Robert Lowell: Life and Art* (p. 207), this reordering of the poems “moves Lowell from the center of his experience . . . toward the periphery,” thereby preventing Lowell’s literary (and perhaps personal) being from basing itself on the “accident” of remembering.

Given this shift from a personal to a historical mode, we might expect to find Lowell reconsidering the nature—or at least the presentation—of remembering in his revisions. This is indeed the case; Lowell reorders remembered events so that, in *History*, they become, if not “rocklike,” at least unified and “packaged.” This tendency is illustrated in the revision of the “Long Summer”¹⁵ sequence (*N*, pp. 5–11) into “1930’s” (*H*, pp. 105–12). In the earlier cycle memory breaks in to the poems in a haphazard way. We begin at “dawn” (“Long Summer” 1), move to “night” (“Long Summer” 2), are suddenly projected into a reflection on “months” (“Long Summer” 3), and then just as suddenly jump “thirty-five summers back” to “the brightest summer” (“Long Summer” 4, line 2). In “1930’s,” however, disrupted as it is by reflective poems that deal with past acquaintances, memory is accoutered with a frame, made into a unit. The leap back in time we encounter in “Long Summer 4” occurs here at the beginning of the sequence:

The vaporish closeness of this two-month fog;
forty summers back, my brightest summer:
the round of Dealer’s Choice, the housebound girls,
fog, the nightlife.

(“1930’s 1,” lines 1–4)

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Having set us up inside the framework of memory, Lowell can now move backward and forward at will, recalling other experiences or reflecting on his present state. At the end of the sequence Lowell completes his bracketing of memory by locating us in the mythical sphere of the "Great Round" through such symbols of eternal return as the moon, clouds, and "the Great Mother," who "shivers under the dead oak" ("1930's 9," line 5). Lowell thus again moves in the direction of "objectifying" memory by associating it with the transcendent or mythological. He again bids for immortality.

This is not to suggest that in either *Notebook 1967–68* or *History* Lowell presents memory as "rocklike," "fixed in the mind," or safe from "the distortions of fantasy" or "the blank befogging of forgetfulness," as it was in *Life Studies*. Lowell has surpassed static conceptions of memory. His dream of his father mingles memory and fantasy, and often in these poems the movement of memory is so intense that it gains a force equal to present experience. Nowhere is this better shown than in Lowell's pivotal recollection of striking his father, a poem that changes little from *Notebook 1967–68* to *History*:

Father's letter to your father said
 stiffly and much too tersely he'd been told
 you visited my college rooms alone—
 I can still crackle that slight note in my hand.
 I see your pink father—you, the outraged daughter.
 That morning nursing my dark, quiet fire
 on the empty steps of the Harvard Fieldhouse in
 vacation . . . saying the start of *Lycidas* to myself
 fevering my mind and cooling my hot nerves—
 we were nomad quicksilver and drove to Boston;
 I knocked my father down. He sat on the carpet—
 my mother calling from the top of the carpeted stairs,
 their glass door locking behind me, no cover; you
 idling in the station wagon, no retreat.

("Anne Dick I, 1936," H, p. 112)

Lowell's shift to present recollection in lines 4–5 sets us up for the last three lines of the poem, in which past and present are indistinguishable. In such a presentation the fluidity of shifts between past and present suggests a mode of remembering that negates fixity and solidity. Thus even though Lowell reverts to earlier models in revisions of the *Notebook* poems, these revisions do not represent a total retreat to the "endurable and perfect" remembering of *Life Studies*. He is in fact ready to challenge the "function," "history," and "drama" of

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memory that bind him to his past, to break from the “rocklike” prison of remembering where “all is preserved by . . . motherly care.”

If in *Notebook 1967–68* Lowell speaks of “the horrifying mortmain of / ephemera” (N, p. 3) which constitutes the past, a legacy he attacks with “the chainsaw bite of whatever squares / the universe by name and number,” by the time of *Day by Day* he has renounced his effort at “squaring” the past in order to exist in the present. He sees “the elephantiasis of the great house” change into “a feathery, fertile waste” (DD, p. 54) and describes his past as “a collapsing / accordion of my receding houses” (DD, p. 73). Houses remembered, revisited, lived in, abound in the book; houses, like Milgate, saved by “the glue of . . . obdurate . . . will” (DD, p. 64). Lowell focuses on these “dead things which alone endure” because he has broken the bonds that held him to his past and simultaneously destroyed all sense of future. Coming to an understanding of experience, expiating guilt, and recognizing formative influences become secondary to the actual existence which ebbs from him as he moves toward death. At the same time his image of his parents changes, moving toward a mode of acceptance that suggests a departure from oedipal structures.

In this shift in emphasis, all endeavor toward connection with “rocklike” memory falls apart in acceptance of the transitory, eternal now. The “collapsing . . . houses” demonstrate Lowell’s renunciation of the “war against death” that man carries on through “accumulations of stone and gold [which] make possible the discovery of the immortal soul” (LAD, p. 286). Brown suggests that “Civilized individuality . . . does not want itself, but wants children, wants heirs, wants an estate. Life remains a war against death . . . and death is overcome by accumulating time-defying monuments” (LAD, p. 286). By paying attention to “receding houses,” Lowell renounces this war, turning rather to “flash-in-the-pan moments / of the Great Day” when “we lived momently / together forever” (DD, p. 53). Experience then becomes “like lightning on an open field,” a passing of “replicas in hierarchy” in which framer and framed become indistinguishable:

From a train, we saw cows
strung out on a hill
at differing heights,
one sex, one herd. . . .

They fly by like a train window.

(“The Day,” DD, p. 53)

Lowell thus escapes from history into a realm where days pass as

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they have since “man first broke / like the crocus all over the earth” (*DD*, p. 53). Like Colonel Shaw in “For the Union Dead,” he opts for “man’s lovely, / peculiar power to choose life and die,”¹⁶ rejecting “the distraction of human life to the war against death” which “results in death’s dominion over life” (*LAD*, p. 284).

Having cast out “preoccupation with the past and the future,” Lowell comes to see memory as something basically insignificant, “50 years of snapshots” (*DD*, p. 22). This comparison of remembered events to snapshots brings us to a new aspect of Lowell’s concept of memory. In *Life Studies* Lowell felt he had captured “direct experience” by “photograph[ing]” the past.¹⁷ These photographs, because “fixed in the mind” were “endurable and perfect.” The *Notebook* poems present a more complex image of memory, a portrayal of fluid events that rush into consciousness from the past. But here, in *Day by Day*, Lowell for the first time questions the *veracity* of memory. Though he does compare remembered events to photographs, these photographs are “first-home photographs, / headless, half-headed, tilting / extinguished by a flashbulb” (*DD*, p. 16). There is no suggestion that memory is “rocklike” or even that it approaches accuracy; indeed, Lowell suggests that “the past changes more than the present” (*DD*, p. 92). Further, remembering and recording remembering fuse imagistically into the same act; neither is distinguishable from the other, and neither can present the truth. Thus in his “Epilogue” to the book, thinking over his work, Lowell states that

everything I write
with the threadbare art of my eye
seems a snapshot,
lurid, rapid, garish, grouped,
heightened from life,
yet paralyzed by fact.
All’s misalliance.

(“Epilogue,” *DD*, p. 127)

Lowell’s memory, like his poetry, floats between fact and fiction, and all he can ask for is the “accuracy” of art. The “blank befogging of forgetfulness” and the “distortions of fantasy” Lowell denied to memories in *Life Studies* here seem their chief characteristic, a characteristic which bleeds into his poetry:

How quickly I run through my little set
of favored pictures . . . pictures starved to words.
My memory economizes so prodigally
I know I have suffered theft.

(“Jean Stafford, a Letter,” *DD*, p. 29)

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Given the claim that Lowell's considerations of the nature of memory reflect shifts within the oedipal structure, we should find this alteration in Lowell's perspective on memory accompanying a shift in his attitudes toward his parents—and indeed it does. The humanization of Lowell's father begun in *Notebook 1967–68* has continued to the point where Lowell can, for the first time, acknowledge his father as a sexual being, someone who might have been "teased" by a girl Lowell sees on a billboard (*DD*, p. 35). In "Robert T. S. Lowell," an imagined dialogue between Lowell and his father, the father describes incidents from his life, explaining as he does so why he was "such a son / as the stork seldom flings to ambition" (*DD*, p. 80). Lowell's expressed desire to have met his father "at my age" meets with his father's rebuke "you had your chance to meet me." Here, for the first time, we see Lowell's father as a father—a man who corrects his son, pointing out his errors and hypocrisy. This rebalancing of the father-son relationship hinges on the father's directive to his son that he lead his own life:

You think that having
 your two children on the same floor this fall . . .
 is like living on a drum
 or a warship—it can't be that,
 it's your life, and dated like mine.

(“Robert T. S. Lowell,” *DD*, p. 81)

The father thus absolves Lowell from fixation on the past, from the guilt Lowell felt for hitting and belittling his father. And with this absolution the father himself seems to fade from Lowell's life. In "For Sheridan" he becomes an image on a "lost negative" that is yet mirrored in Lowell and his son. Looking at a photograph, Lowell sees father, self, and son meld together:

Three ages in a flash:
 the same child in the same picture,
 he, I, you,
 chockablock, one stamp
 like mother's wedding silver.

(“For Sheridan,” *DD*, p. 82)

In time, then, father, son, and grandson are "replicas in hierarchy" like the cows in "The Day" that become "flash-in-the-pan moments." Lowell's father, removed from the obfuscations of cliché, becomes human and, like all humans, passes on.

Lowell's attitude toward his mother still retains some ambiguity. However, we find elements in it suggesting a recognition of the oedipal inclination and a consequent ability to face the mother more directly as

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a person. Acknowledging for the first time the prepubescent sexuality that lies under the surface of *Life Studies*, Lowell recalls his “parent’s townhouse” where, from a “skylight-covered courtyard,” he could look into “two floors of bathrooms”:

there for a winter or so,
when eleven or twelve,
one year short
of the catastrophic brink of adolescence,
I nightly enjoyed my mother bathing—
not lust, but the lust of the eye.

(“Art of the Possible,” *DD*, p. 36)¹⁸

Though Lowell describes the desire he openly acknowledges feeling for his mother as “lust of the eye,” its mere acknowledgment suggests an awareness of the oedipal elements in the relation—an awareness possibly enhanced, as a friend suggests to him, by the fact that “Father Freud brainwashed [him] to hate [his] mother” (“Art of the Possible,” *DD*, p. 36). Counterbalancing his desire, Lowell admits to disliking his mother in “To Mother.” But he suggests that this dislike stems largely from similarities he sees between himself and her. This recognition began to appear as early as *History* where, in “Mother, 1972,” he found himself “now more than ever fearing everything I do / is only (only) a mix of mother and father” (*H*, p. 115). But Lowell’s understanding of these similarities is stronger now that he has climbed the “ladder of ripening likeness” (*DD*, p. 22). “It has taken me the time since you died / to discover you are as human as I am” (*DD*, p. 79), he states in “To Mother,” granting a humanness to her which balances her psychic configuration but gets twisted by the poem’s last line—“if I am.”

By rehumanizing his mother, now suitably characterized as “Josephine Beauharnais, *la femme militaire*” (“To Mother,” *DD*, p. 78), Lowell can recognize, more objectively than previously, the dynamics of his interaction with her. His continuing ambiguous feelings for her (he both wishes to be with her, reflecting his affection, and recalls how he used to enjoy “hearing gossip on you,” a comment that suggests a certain malevolence) finally center on rebukes Lowell received from her as a child—rebukes which he hints might partly be responsible for the outbreaks of mental illness he suffered in his adult life. In bed, alone, a manic attack approaching, Lowell recalls how

Mother under one of her five-minute spells
had a flair for total recall,
and told me, item by item, person by person,
how my relentless, unpredictable selfishness

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had disappointed and removed
anyone who tried to help—
but I cannot correct the delicate compass needle
so easily set ajar.

(“Ten Minutes,” *DD*, p. 108)

The north from which the needle has moved is the sense of love—the love of mother for child, and the reciprocating love of child for mother. If Lowell cannot “correct the compass needle” and return to a lost, “innocent” love for her, he can at least see the point at which that love was “set ajar,” localizing it in specific characteristics of the relationship he had with her and thereby releasing some of the oedipal energy linked to this relation. Interestingly, what precipitated the dislodging of their love is the mother’s “flair for total recall,” a capacity Lowell might now find suspect.

Lowell thus recognizes some of the sources of ambiguity in his feelings for his mother and hence removes some of her oedipal charge. But even as he acknowledges these sources, he recognizes a potentiality for error embedded in *any* understanding founded on memory, including an understanding as determinative as a rethought relation to one’s mother. In “Unwanted,” a long, meditative poem on “the one unpardonable sin”—our “fear of not being wanted” (*DD*, p. 124)—Lowell reveals sides of his relation with his mother he has never shown before, yet leaves the central question of whether he was an unwanted child unanswered. He artfully prepares us for the revelation that his conception was unplanned, but at the same time suggests that this feeling might merely represent his own interpretation of events in his life, an unhappy result of his childhood. Ultimately, he suggests, his fear may be as much his own invention as the outcome of any interaction between himself and his mother. He sees “causes for my misadventure, considered / for forty years too obvious to name,” which “give my simple autobiography a plot,” yet realizes that these causes are “only . . . my own story,” “flashes” from a time “when I first found / a humor for myself in images, / farfetched misalliance / that made evasion a revelation” (*DD*, p. 121). The “simple autobiography” may have been plotted on wrong perception; revelation, including the revelations of remembering, becomes an “evasion,” a way of not discovering the truth.

Lowell ultimately does not know whether Dr. Moore’s assertion that he was “an unwanted child” is true; he does not know if Dr. Moore was his mother’s lover, or even if “mother was stupid” compared to his wives—though in the end he decides she was. His long narrative passage on his mother’s walks on “refusey Staten Island beaches” while

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she was pregnant with him—walks punctuated by her “yearning seaward, far from any home, and saying, / ‘I wish I were dead, I wish I were dead’”—is *her* story, words she told Lowell “perhaps” to show how “we survived, / while weaklings fell with the dead and dying” (*DD*, p. 123). Her position in his psyche gets tempered by Lowell’s acknowledgement of motivations on her behalf that possibly are beyond his ken. The mother’s stories may be “art,” “a way to get well,” just as Lowell’s poems may represent an effort at self-cure.

Whatever the truth, Lowell sees his doubt over his parents’ desire to have him as the source of his hell-fire-and-brimstone youth, an inclination he traces gently, mockingly, and materialistically to his earliest childhood:

When I was three months,
I rocked back and forth howling
for weeks, for weeks each hour . . .
Then I found the thing I loved most
was the anorexia Christ
swinging on Nellie’s gaudy rosary.
It disappeared, I said nothing,
but mother saw me poking strips of paper
down a floor-grate to the central heating.
“Oh Bobby, do you want to set us on fire?”
“Yes . . . that’s where Jesus is.” I smiled.
(“Unwanted,” *DD*, p. 124)

Having chosen “the marriage with nothingness,” the “peculiar power to choose life and die” which allows him to live by forcing him to acknowledge the inevitability of his own death, Lowell lifts himself out of “denial of life” and uncovers deeply repressed memories—only to find these memories unaffirmable, ephemeral, “flash-in-the-pan moments / of the Great Day.” The unfolding of his life becomes the telling of a story; the “getting well” he aims at in “confession” becomes indistinguishable from “art,” and memory becomes “an old turtle, / . . . / kept afloat by losing touch . . . / no longer able to hiss or lift / a useless shield against the killer” (“Turtle,” *DD*, p. 98). At the same time, his parents become human, developing motives and personalities not determined by their psychic significance to him and perhaps ultimately unknowable. Thus Lowell’s “heavenly hours of absorption and idleness” spent “staring, crossing out, writing in, crossing out”¹⁹ leave us a record of his growth through his art in the shifts in his perceptions of his parents and in his understanding of the very nature of memory itself.

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¹ Marjorie G. Perloff, *The Poetic Art of Robert Lowell* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1973), p. 1.

² Robert Lowell, "Epics," *New York Review of Books*, 21 Feb. 1980, p. 3. Reprinted in Robert Lowell, *Collected Prose*, ed. Robert Giroux (New York: Farrar, 1987), pp. 213-22.

³ Robert Lowell, *Life Studies*, in *Life Studies and For the Union Dead* (New York: Noonday Press, 1971). Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *LS*.

⁴ Robert Lowell, "For Frank Parker," in *Day by Day* (New York: Farrar, 1977), p. 92. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *DD*.

⁵ Robert Lowell, *Notebook 1967-68* (New York: Farrar, 1969). Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *N*.

⁶ Robert Lowell, *History* (New York: Farrar, 1973). Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *H*.

⁷ Robert Lowell and Frederick Seidel, "Robert Lowell Interviewed by Frederick Seidel," in *Robert Lowell: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Thomas Parkinson (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp. 23-24.

⁸ Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: or, Cosmos and History*, Bollingen Series, No. 46 (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971), p. 35.

⁹ Alan Williamson, *Pity the Monsters: The Political Vision of Robert Lowell* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1974), p. 108.

¹⁰ Norman O. Brown, *Life against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1959), p. 281. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *LAD*. Since both *Life Studies* and *Life against Death* were published in 1959, it is improbable that Brown's work influenced *Life Studies* itself.

¹¹ "The process of individualization" which the Oedipus project constitutes "is naturally built up by or based on hostile trends directed against the mother. . . . However, just because of the dual-unity matrix from which the differentiation takes its starting point, these aggressions are followed by guilt, by reparations, or reidentification and then again by renewed aggression" (G. Roheim, *War, Crime and the Covenant*, quoted in Brown, *Life against Death*, p. 129).

¹² Erich Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, Bollingen Series, No. 42 (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971), p. 27. Hereafter cited in the text as *OHC*.

¹³ See Lowell's comments on "On 'Skunk Hour'" about this moment in the work as basically representing the reaffirmation of life after contemplation of suicide. "Stanzas V and VI [represent] the dark night. . . . Somewhere in my mind was a passage from Sartre or Camus about reaching some point of final darkness where the one free act is suicide. Out of this comes the march and affirmation, an ambiguous one, of my skunks. . . ." Robert Lowell, "On 'Skunk Hour,'" *Collected Prose*, p. 226.

¹⁴ Steven Gould Axelrod, *Robert Lowell: Life and Art* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978), p. 194.

¹⁵ Hereafter referred to in the text as "Long Summer."

¹⁶ Robert Lowell, "For the Union Dead," *For the Union Dead*, in *Life Studies* and *For the Union Dead*, p. 71.

¹⁷ Robert Lowell and V. S. Naipaul, "Et in America ego—the American

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Poet Robert Lowell Talks to the Novelist V. S. Naipaul about Art, Power, and the Dramatisation of the Self," *Listener*, 4 Sept. 1969, p. 304.

¹⁸ Lowell mentions this preadolescent voyeurism in "Eye and Tooth," *For the Union Dead*, in *Life Studies* and *For the Union Dead*, pp. 8–19, but makes no mention of the fact that the object of his voyeurism is his mother.

¹⁹ Robert Lowell, "After Enjoying Six or Seven Essays on Me," *Salmagundi*, 37 (Spring 1977), 112.

The Temporal-Moral Matrix of Heinrich Böll's *Billiards at Half-past Nine*

DIANE STEVENSON

Because Heinrich Böll's *Billiards at Half-past Nine*¹ deals with two abstract subjects—time and morality—it is anything but linear in development. Time, rather than being presented chronologically, becomes instead the shifting dimension of past and present through which character is filtered. And morality, rather than being a question of individual right and wrong, becomes instead the timeless issue of good versus evil by which character is refined. In order to understand the relationship between the temporal and the moral—to appreciate, in other words, the thematic complexity of this novel—it is necessary to first examine two finely balanced aspects of the novel's structure: the narrative technique, which is a seemingly disjointed patchwork of random memory; and the device of echoing, which systematically establishes temporal and moral coherence.

The first part of this essay, then, will concern itself with the structure of *Billiards at Half-past Nine*, and the second part will deal with the thematic elements of time and morality, and, to the extent character constitutes the vehicle for these abstractions, with Heinrich, Johanna, and Robert Faehmel.

Billiards at Half-past Nine is about time, and also uses time as a technique.² We are immediately aware, for example, that the novel opens on Heinrich Faehmel's eightieth birthday. Soon after, it becomes apparent that he built St. Anthony's in his twenty-ninth year and that his son, Robert, destroyed the Abbey in his twenty-ninth year. And finally, as the novel draws to a close, we realize that its elapsed time will not exceed one day. All these minor structural details draw attention to an abstraction: a birthday obviously marks the passage of time; there

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exists a correspondence *in time* between father and son, creation and destruction; and the novel itself has a highly circumscribed temporal dimension. Thus time, while a subject of the novel, is also a technique employed to draw attention to itself as subject. As technique, there is the time "umbrella" of a single day, a birthday, and there is, additionally, a system of echoes uniting the characters in a continuum of time.

However, there often seems very little that does distinguish past from present, because the narrative technique is based on a temporal shifting during which various characters remember or relive the events we, as readers, need for background. The present repeatedly dissolves into the past, and here, time-as-technique becomes time-as-subject: each character attempts to live *in* the present while simultaneously struggling to come to terms with the weight of the past. While this in itself is "subject" enough, it is not what makes *Billiards at Half-past Nine* a difficult novel. Time is constituted of three dimensions: past, present, and future. Initially, the novel seems concerned only with the complicated relationship of past to present. But by implication, when Johanna is released and Schrella returns, it becomes evident that the future of Germany is Böll's central concern.

Billiards at Half-past Nine is also about morality, and several of the techniques Böll employs to make time point to itself are also used to make time point to morality. There is, in addition to a system of echoes uniting certain characters morally, a moral "umbrella"—Gretz's boar. Throughout the novel, different characters notice its continuing presence, and its past existence is remarked upon by almost all the characters during their journeys through memory. The boar carcass is therefore a tangible constant within shifting time, and as such provides a certain sense of continuity. But the implications are unfortunate. Faehmel, looking out the window at the boar, thinks: "Blood, the public had to see it" (pp. 78–79). Moreover, the reader is never allowed to forget that Gretz did, in fact, turn his mother in to the "higher power" for saying "It's a sin and a shame." The bloody animals, hanging year after year in Gretz's store window, are referred to as "beasts," and their existence is a palpable reminder of the threat they seem to symbolize, the Host of the Beast. Based on the evidence of the past, the boar's ubiquitous presence therefore inevitably invites certain conclusions about a possible German future.

In *Billiards at Half-past Nine*, future time exists by implication, and by implication, too, do we finally understand the complicated moral universe of this novel. In fact, implication ultimately joins time to morality, making a single subject out of what first appears to be two. If

the central "problem" and final gesture of Böll's novel is Johanna's act of violence, justification for it can be found in the implied moral structure that is so closely related to time-as-subject. While the weight of the German past is felt by all the central characters, it is a collective memory clearly designed to point directly to the future: the past may indeed be remembered and regretted, but the future, because its outcome is contingent on action alone, is the true moral realm. Rejecting the past, then, is a necessary and continuous process made real by gestures that, in the present, act on behalf of the future. Johanna's firing of the gun becomes morally intelligible not so much as an act of vengeance motivated by memory, but as a gesture against all the timeless evil that once again threatens to destroy Germany.

While justification for an attempted murder is the last difficulty presented by *Billiards at Half-past Nine*, one of the first is narrative technique.³ No sooner is a character introduced in the present than both the character and his temporal location dissolve into an amorphous past that, in turn, dissolves into yet another dimension of the past. One memory will associatively cause the next, which might be separated in time from the first by intervening months or years that only the character himself knows have passed. Because of the intensity of memory, the past often *becomes* the present for the character, and indeed *is* the present for the reader. In this way, past events are more than a story in the telling: they assume, instead, the urgency and significance of a continuing present that constantly threatens to become the future.

The first central character whose mind and private world we enter is Heinrich Faehmel. Initially, the process of present dissolving into the past is heralded by an obvious cue: "Suddenly a mist came into his eyes. A trap door slammed shut. The old man was drifting back in time, sinking back into the first, the third, the sixth decade of his life. . . . Now only that October morning in 1902 was real" (p. 10). Because only that moment, or memory, is then "real," Faehmel literally *relives* that precise time in the past.

Later, when he and Leonore have moved to his studio to rearrange stacks of architectural drawings and estimates, the cues are provided by the dates on the material. These dates themselves serve to stimulate memory and also function narratively as anchors to the present: again and again Faehmel directly addresses Leonore, who draws his attention (in the present) to first one past date then another.

In other, more complicated ways, the present actually merges with

the past. At one point Faehmel looks out into the street and remarks to Leonore that her office window is visible, and verbally "imagines" her sitting inside. The omniscient "voice" that alternates with the "I" of Faehmel's first-person recollections then poses the question: "Why did the cup suddenly tremble and clink, as if from the pounding of the presses?" (p. 83). Shortly after, seemingly in concert with that omniscient voice, Faehmel thinks or says, "I felt that same trembling countless mornings when, propped on my elbows, I looked down into the street at that blonde head of hair passing by . . ." (p. 83). Both the "trembling" of the cup and the imagined head of blonde hair, the first a tactile cue, the second an imagined visual one, then combine to prompt a memory of his wife: once again Faehmel journeys into the past, to be brought back to the present by, again, reference to the cups: "You're right Leonore, the presses are a nuisance. How many cups they've smashed on me when I wasn't careful" (p. 89).

Faehmel's interior life, presented disjointedly and remembered associatively, is given coherence by repeated reference to dates and objects. His perceptions in the present also provide unity within the fragmented narrative structure by remaining constant despite the number of times he returns to and relives the past. The window, for example, is first described by the omniscient voice as being "kaleidoscopic" (p. 100); again, six pages later, the detached narrative comment refers to the window as "the kaleidoscope"; and shortly after that, the same description is again repeated in what appears to be a blend of the omniscient voice and Faehmel's own perception: "Today Gretz had not sold his wild boar, dark and dry its bloody snout. Over there, kaleidoscopically framed, the roof garden . . ." (p. 114).

Indeed, it is sometimes difficult to tell when the purely descriptive, disembodied narrative voice ends and when Faehmel's own thought processes begin, because the two blend so subtly. In the same way, it is often impossible to ascertain whether the words on the page are being said to Leonore, his auditor, whether they represent Faehmel's thoughts, or whether they are a combination of verbal and private recollection.

The complexity of the narrative technique, already compounded by two separate "voices"—the omniscient one that refers to Faehmel as "he," and the "I" of Faehmel himself—is increased by the use of highly complicated temporal dimensions. There is, first of all, the past, which is a constant accumulation of moments no longer present, and which ranges in time from earlier in the day to Faehmel's young adulthood fifty years before. But there is also the past as a relived experience, and

then events ranging over a fifty-year period of time become, for Faehmel and for the reader, the present. When Faehmel becomes immersed in the past, a sense of immediacy is nevertheless conveyed to the reader by, for example, use of a narrative remark like "Only that October morning in 1902 was real." What follows is 1902, the past as the very real experience of the present, *in the present*. Second, there is the *actual* present of something like a perception. While perceptions may indeed be recalled, the *act* of perceiving must itself take place in the present. Only when he addresses Leonore or looks out the window, does Faehmel do so from the acknowledged perspective of September 6, 1958.

In addition to past, relived past, and present, another, more subtle dimension of time emerges: reflection. When he relives the past, Faehmel is totally immersed in it—it is that October moment in 1902. And when Faehmel perceives, he does so in the actual present. But sometimes he regrets the past, and wishes he had acted differently. To do so, he must be able to understand the past from the perspective of the present. This involves memory, of course, and is, like perception, an activity taking place in the present. But because reflection is contingent on the existence of a past, it stands in relation to both as a midway point. When Faehmel talks to Robert at the Denklingen station bar, for example, he refers to the "false considerations" he once had that caused him to keep his "superiority feelings fresh in a refrigerator of irony . . ." (pp. 162–63). Rather than reliving his youth at this point, Faehmel instead makes a judgment about past attitudes and behavior.

Böll employs many of the same complexities and techniques to reveal the content of Robert's and Johanna's consciousness. Both characters have, like Faehmel, an auditor to whom they direct their thoughts. Playing billiards, Robert responds to Hugo's "cue"—"No stories today, Doctor?" (p. 32)—by recounting the day of the rounders game. This particular memory is also introduced by the omniscient observation that Robert's memories hinged "only on movement" (p. 32). Once prepared for in this way, the dissolution to past time is simple: "He saw himself, playing rounders, bending over the bats to pick out his own . . ." (p. 33). What then follows is Robert's memory of the day he saved Schrella, a memory that becomes, like Faehmel's, a believed event. It, too, is punctuated by remarks to the auditor that signal a temporary surfacing to the present: "And yet I knew, Hugo, how much Nettlinger had his mind set on winning" (p. 37).

Robert's complex mind and the process of his consciousness are directly revealed at several other points in the novel as well. When, for

example, he waits for his father in the Denklingen station bar near the sanatorium, he recalls, because of the occasion and place, being interrogated by an American officer about the demolition of St. Anthony's. In rapid sequence, the present, which has as its locus a young couple sitting where the American once did, dissolves to the past, then returns to the present: in a space of six pages, in fact, there are eleven time shifts that range from past to present, to the midway point of reflection (pp. 154–60).

In another complicated time “duet” with his mother, Robert serves as her auditor and accomplice; she sends him upstairs in the sanatorium in order to “reenact” different events: “How many times had he stood at this station in the loft, to which again and again she sent him so that her rememberings might be precisely retraced and fulfilled. Now he was standing there as the twenty-two year old Robert . . .” (p. 129). At this point, of course, we again enter the mind of Robert, “cued” (by the mention of specific age) to the fact that a corresponding memory will ensue.

Just as Faehmel’s temporal shifts increase in the method of their complexity, so do Robert’s. Shortly after the first reenactment with Johanna, he is “repositioned”: “Now he was permitted to leave the station at which his mother had posted him. Caption: ‘Edith, Joseph’” (p. 133). Again, Johanna provides her own “cue” as well as Robert’s: he recalls, in conjunction with the caption, his mother addressing him: “You should see what you can do about making up with Otto. Please, please try. Go now, please” (p. 134). Past and present in this delicate counterpoint meet, for not only does he *remember* her saying these words, but also they are her next instructions for reenactment *in the present*. As such, they seem indistinguishable from the natural flow of Robert’s own memory. Johanna’s entreaty, in other words, provides not only an indicator of present action, but also makes available direct access to Robert’s memory that renders reenactment and original enactment identical in time: Johanna’s past is Robert’s present, which itself dissolves into the second half of a mutually conceived memory.

For Johanna, in fact, much of the past is intensely present. When Robert visits she cautions him: “No, don’t touch any of it, Robert—Gretz’s pâtés, or the Abbot’s butter and honey . . .” (p. 126), as if the times that warranted such injunctions had not passed, as if her son had not aged. In some ways, too, Johanna’s mind is the most blatantly associative; she encourages Robert to remember his brother Heinrich—who died when Robert was two—by reminding him of specific connections logically quite clear to her: dogs, reins, (therefore) brother.

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But despite her incarceration and her "reenactments," Johanna is by no means as "crazy" as she first appears to be. She, too, engages in reflection, which indicates she can and does distinguish the present from the past. One moment she refers to the lambs killed by geese, the meaning of which is not immediately apparent, but the next moment she demonstrates that she is capable of assessing the past *in relation* to the present with remarks like "At that stage, Robert, we didn't have any idea that merely raising your hand could cost you a life" (p. 128). Moreover, Johanna is painfully aware of being "stalled" in time, of being unable to live actively past 1942. To her husband, she says "I don't want to know how it is in the present" (p. 151). She is perfectly aware, however, of "the date on the calendar down the hall" (p. 145).

Despite the difficulties posed by a narrative technique having not only a sporadic omniscient voice, but three central characters (and several secondary ones) who all become at different times the "I" of the novel, and which additionally incorporates three sometimes indistinct temporal dimensions through which those characters filter,⁴ *Billiards at Half-past Nine* nevertheless conveys a sense of great coherence. It does so by means of (among other things) an elaborate system of echoes and repetitions. Events, phrases, and perceptions appear as the memories, words, and thoughts of one character at one point in time, only to reappear later in the novel as the memories, words, or thoughts of another character. Sometimes these echoes are thematically unimportant; other times they relate in a significant way to the novel's theme. In either case, these echoes—comprised of the smallest details worked into an extensive network—provide fine balance to the chaotic episodes of ultimately private memory by establishing a sense of temporal and moral constancy. On the one hand, then, time is experienced (by character *and* reader) as random, unreliable, and shifting; on the other hand, the systematic repetition running through the novel acts as a force that unifies time, and creates, as well, a moral brotherhood.

Although there are countless examples of incidental echoes (termed "motifs" by Crowner and others) only a few will be dealt with here. One of the first involves Leonore, alone in the office, pasting stamps of President Heuss on envelopes to be mailed (p. 5). Later, when Faehmel joins her, he draws attention to this gesture by remembering the office girl who fifty years before sat in Leonore's place doing the same thing, and he mentions, too, that her name was Josephine (p. 14). Much later in the novel, this small detail is repeated when Johanna, submerged somewhere in the past, happens to recall Josephine pasting stamps of Hindenburg "in all colors" onto envelopes (p. 141).

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While she is alone in the office, Leonore also reviews her association with Robert, concluding that she had never seen him eat, that he never smelled of food or alcohol, that, in short, she had never seen him do anything that "was human or intimate. . . . She'd never seen him have a head cold" (p. 5). When Robert visits his mother, Johanna reveals an almost identical perception, one that might well be from Leonore's own point of view: "You look like the kind of office boss people would like to hear cough, just once anyway, but who's too refined to permit himself such a thing as a cough" (p. 121).

Billiards at Half-past Nine contains many more incidental echoes so subtly placed within the larger content of the novel as a whole that they are only subliminally absorbed by the reader. For example, Robert thinks his daughter, Ruth, brushes her hair back from her forehead in a gesture identical to his grandmother's (p. 33), and 212 pages later, Johanna makes the same observation, that, in an apparently casual way, happens to unite four generations: "How often did I see my mother in Ruth when she brushed the hair away from her forehead" (p. 245). Jochen, an employee at the Prince Heinrich Hotel, thinks to himself that people never ask the price of anything (p. 18), and 205 pages later, this same, seemingly unimportant observation is made by Schrella, who has just returned from abroad (p. 223). The phrase *lambs killed by geese*, which originates as Johanna's symbolic perception of death (p. 122), is echoed eighty-two pages later by Marianne, who first heard it, coincidentally, from Johanna years before they knew each other (p. 204).

Finally, there are obvious refrains throughout the novel: "Apprentices, trucks, nuns. Life in the streets," signals the observation made by various characters regarding mundane, oblivious existence. And, of course, the entire Faehmel family at one time or another remembers, in conjunction with the war years, different events that are summarized, almost symbolized, by the phrase "lifting a hand could cost you a life."

Considered as a system or network designed to create continuity in time, these insistent repetitions are a powerful force within the novel, a force representing order, unity, and coherence. On the other hand, the narrative structure, it will be remembered, creates a strong sense of temporal chaos and unreliability. Time-as-technique, therefore, establishes the existence of two opposing forces, and maintains them in delicate balance.

In the same way, the network of echoes functioning to unite characters morally represents one force operating within the larger framework of good versus evil—that of the Lambs, who are engaged in

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a timeless struggle with the elements of evil represented by the Beast. The three examples of moral echoing to be considered all present a picture of an ideal world based on values quite removed from those "Apprentices, trucks, nuns. Life in the streets."

The first example concerns the value of sacrifice for the sake of justice and humanity. Throughout, the novel illustrates various forms of temptation, all of which can corrupt character by appealing to human greed, weakness, and the desire for supremacy over others. One of these temptations, particularly strong during the years of scarcity, is hunger and the consequent drive to acquire food. The strength of this primal temptation is exemplified by Ruth's story of Mr. Krott, the elementary school teacher who once stole sandwiches from a student, then blamed and punished the rest of the class for his own theft. In reaction to the injustice that drove some people to steal while others enjoyed more and better food than they needed, both Robert and Johanna give away the honey and butter that privilege has permitted them.

This type of sacrifice, common to the Lambs, allows them to realize the relative significance of food itself: as Schrella says, a meal is, first of all, an "act of great brotherliness . . . a feast of love" (p. 182). All the Lambs share this belief and practice. When Robert, for example, first meets Edith and they sit down to dinner, he thinks "we should be eating with our fingers," because he understands, "for the first time," that eating is intended "to appease hunger, no more" (p. 130).

Robert's conviction is echoed twice. First, Johanna thinks "blessed are those who are allowed to eat with their fingers" (p. 147). And, toward the novel's end, the conviction takes visible form when Schrella does, in fact, eat with his fingers, embarrassing Nettlinger, who, as a representative of the Beast, cannot resist any temptation, least of all the temptation of food: his gluttony is vividly juxtaposed with Schrella's indifference to the food obscuring any meal's symbolic meaning.

The second instance of moral echoing concerns the value of realizing human limitation. While the Beasts consider themselves, as Faehmel says, "the higher power," able without conscience to behead Ferdi for burning the legs of a violent and corrupt teacher, able to corner and flog those who will not adopt intimidation as a way of life, the Lambs do acknowledge human limitation. When Nettlinger accuses Schrella of being "more merciless than God" because he cannot forgive the cruelties of the Beast, Schrella replies, "We're not God and can't any more measure up to His mercy than to His omniscience" (p. 176). Another Lamb, Marianne, echoes this during her confession of wartime

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grief. She tells Joseph that in response to those who accused her of cynicism for repudiating her "natural" mother, therefore asking her, in other words, if she intended to be "harder than God in His judgment," she consistently replied, "I'm not God, and that's why I can't be as forgiving as He is" (p. 207).

Marianne's relationship to her natural mother is, in fact, an integral part of the third and most important group of moral echoes. When Mrs. Droste returns to claim her daughter (by then living in the home of adoptive parents), Marianne refuses to acknowledge the "natural" mother's rights, claiming they were relinquished by her mother's unnatural actions. Mrs. Droste asks, "You must be my Marianne—can't you feel it in your blood?" (p. 207). To this and all similar entreaties, Marianne replies: "I don't feel it in my blood—I simply don't feel it" (p. 207).

These same words are spoken by Ruth when, later in the novel, Schrella returns to suddenly become her uncle. Joseph says, "Tell me Ruth, what do you think of your new uncle? Do you feel it in your blood when you look at him?" (p. 260). Ruth answers, "No . . . my blood tells me nothing . . ." (p. 260). The belief expressed by Marianne and Ruth is shared by all the Lambs: there exists a higher bond than that of simple blood kinship, a bond based on a vision of the world as a necessarily moral realm in which brotherhood is established and maintained by shared values alone.

The denial of the "natural" family as a guarantor of moral kinship is exemplified throughout the novel. First of all, both Gretz and Mrs. Droste demonstrate, by their actions toward family members, the tenuousness of those ties alone: if the human heart is corrupt to begin with, no allegiance is safe from the ultimate violation of betrayal in the name of duty and obedience. Of course the most vivid and tragic example of this is Otto, whose estrangement from the moral world of his family (and therefore from his family itself), is so absolute, so irrevocable, that Robert considers "brother," in relation to Otto, to be a meaningless word (p. 134).

If "natural" ties alone are consistently denied as the legitimate basis for spiritually profound relationships, then equally emphasized within the novel are those ties that serve to affirm. Faehmel and Johanna, although deprived of a son, reveal that their sense of kinship toward Robert's wife, Edith, was stronger than it would have been had Edith been their own daughter.

Not only is the sense of moral brotherhood illustrated by the diametrically opposed examples of Otto and Edith, both of whom

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involve episodes from the past, but it finds verbal expression as well, and extends into the future. When Robert discusses with Schrella his plans to adopt Hugo, Schrella articulates what all the Lambs feel and act upon: "You're right, Robert, one can't be a father, one *becomes* a father. That feeling in the blood is false, the other feeling alone is true . . ." (p. 270). The unity of the Lambs, based on that "other feeling," is demonstrated repeatedly by what they endured in the past. But that brotherhood is not simply backward-glancing: with Robert's adoption of Hugo, who has Edith's smile (p. 164), and Ferdi's spirit (p. 268), the brotherhood continues. As Robert says of his future son: "Yes we need him, and we'd be glad if he needed us. Better still—we're suffering from the want of him" (p. 268).

The moral universe peopled by the Lambs is, as we have seen, a place real with the enduring values of humility, sacrifice, humanity, and brotherhood. While these values are Christian, the morality of the Lambs is not based on strictly Christian doctrine. One of their "commandments"—the only one we ever specifically discover, in fact—is revealed by Schrella: all Lambs swear to uphold "the nobility of defenselessness" (p. 221). We also learn from Johanna that the Lambs have a particular attitude toward the "God" and "Lord" mentioned throughout the novel: "the Lord is our brother, and among brothers you can laugh sometimes and feel at ease, even if you can't among Lords and Masters" (p. 122).

In *Billiards at Half-past Nine*, morality, like time, is comprised of the opposing forces of chaos and coherence. The Beast, though proclaiming the virtues of order and respectability, actually stands for impassioned obedience to the belief that no power is greater than man's, that any means employed to execute the demand of power can be justified, that all value is relative to the service of power. While its guise is order and respectability, the Beast is, in fact, moral chaos. Moral order, on the other hand, is a force and ideal in all ways supported by the Lambs, who do acknowledge the existence of a power beyond the strictly human, who do maintain that certain values have an autonomous, eternal existence.

But time and morality in *Billiards at Half-past Nine* are related by more than technique. First of all, to say that time-as-technique establishes both chaos and order within the novel is itself to invite consideration of time-as-subject, for what can such a carefully wrought temporal ambiguity mean? The temptation is, of course, to connect the two major themes at this point and answer that temporal and moral

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chaos must in some significant way correspond, that as long as value is relative, for example, to the requirements of circumstance, time will not be experienced as a continuous process of historical development. Perhaps this is what Johanna means when she says, "We don't think of time as an indefinite continuous concept but rather as separate units which must not be related and become history" (pp. 238-39). Conversely, if there are eternal values, then time becomes a phenomenon extending from the past through the present, and into the future: time becomes, in other words, parallel to its moral counterpart, and is therefore experienced as eternal as well.

While these observations are probably true, time-as-subject is related to morality in a more specific way. As was suggested earlier, time-as-subject involves, in part, each character coming to terms with the weight of the past. (Because character is an important component of the temporal/moral matrix, it will be dealt with at length later in this essay.) The past, in fact, virtually permeates the novel, and, considering the many ways time-as-technique draws attention to the time frame of a single day, the present does too.⁵ Time is, therefore, emphasized as a *phenomenon*, and as such, another dimension is necessarily entailed—the future, which, because it does not yet *actually* exist, remains implied. But the importance of the future is nevertheless clearly evident.

For the Lambs in *Billiards at Half-past Nine*, the past is very much alive, and imbued with a sense of urgency. We see that each character accumulates the living past so urgently, in fact, within the context of one day, that the novel virtually explodes into the remaining temporal dimension—the implied future. Time is a subject of the novel, then, in two ways. First, recorded time is the history of recorded events, like Germany's wars, and as such is a manifest index of German conscience or consciousness. History in one sense is evidence, gathered into the present, and guiding the present into the future. Second, time is internal, the private realm of individual conscience/consciousness that attempts to align itself with the history of recorded events in a way that makes the present comprehensible and the future bearable. For the Lambs who resisted the past while it was actually happening, and who, continuing to resist it in memory, keep it alive, time itself is experienced as problematic. Moving temporally from past to future, history is indeed evidence, but its relationship to the future is one of mutual contingency: the past is an index to the future, and the future (as Jean-Paul Sartre suggests) determines whether the past is living or dead.

Here, time and morality meet.⁶ The values of humility, sacrifice,

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humanity, and brotherhood (all based on the acknowledgment of a "higher power") are, to the Lambs, eternal, universal, and absolute. Those values, however, so successfully violated in the past by the Beast, cause the past to be felt daily, as both alive and urgent. Because in the past evil triumphed, the past is alive, and because evil continues to exist, the past is urgent as well. Robert best expresses the Lambs' inability to let the past die when, invited to the new Abbey's consecration, he thinks to himself:

I'm not reconciled. Not reconciled with the powers guilty of Ferdi's death, or the ones that caused Edith to die and St. Severin's to be spared. I'm not reconciled, not reconciled either to myself or to the spirit of reconciliation which you in your official speech will proclaim. (p. 228)

Finally, because past and future are mutually contingent, the future, as the Lambs well know, is the one remaining temporal realm available to them. For the Lambs, the moral life *is* life, and the tenuous future is where its continuance will be decided.

To understand better what an "urgent" past means, and, more importantly, to understand how the climax of *Billiards at Half-past Nine* represents the future, it is necessary to examine briefly the three central characters' relationship to both time and morality.

The most ubiquitous character in Böll's novel is Faehmel; in fact, he almost "frames" the novel. He appears first, and the novel ends with his birthday celebration. In one sense, then, his consciousness is absorbed with the type of reflection common to an eighty-year-old man reviewing the events of a long life. But Faehmel spends more time thinking *about* time than any other character, and this particular vein of theoretical musing makes him time's spokesman. He repeatedly draws attention to time as a phenomenon by converting it into metaphor: "When I closed my eyes again time divided into bands like a spectrum: past, present, future" (p. 95).

Reliving the events of his youth, Faehmel indirectly reveals that time, in addition to being the central mystery of life, is also the source of a lesson he still struggles to learn. With remarks like "I've always felt sure about the future, so sure that to me the present has always seemed like the past fulfilled" (p. 75), Faehmel exposes himself as a temporal egoist, so to speak. Only the occasional (and ironic) remarks made by Faehmel and others, remind us that the youthful certainty which led him to consider people as "supporting players" (p. 99) never materialized into the countless grandchildren he fully expected to have by his eightieth birthday. Faehmel also indicates that this early certainty,

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so inextricably bound to the subjectivistic conviction that one's destiny can remain untouched by worldly events, is indeed shaken by sometimes the smallest event. His "education" finally includes understanding that "Time . . . was subject to outside intervention, and not entirely governed out of the privacy of my dreams" (p. 87).

Corresponding to this realization is Faehmel's gradual understanding that moral growth, too, is a reality. But this process is difficult, and, for Faehmel, still incomplete. When he first arrives in the city, Faehmel sets himself apart from his fellow man in an act of deliberate temporal and moral isolation: the future, he thinks, will be determined only by him, because only he decided "what should exist, what should not" (p. 108). Symbolizing this egocentrism (and naïveté) is Faehmel's laugh, which, he confesses, had "mockery and derision in it, even malice . . ." (p. 69). Slowly, it occurs to him that the laugh he originally thought of as "a useful weapon" is, instead "a small deception of sorts" (p. 90), is in fact, the *self-deception* of believing in the distance irony can provide.

Faehmel laughs because he thinks himself—as an individual—to be of absolute importance, an agent able to control his own destiny, which, to him, was once the only destiny worth taking into account. When Johanna speaks out against the Kaiser, calling him a "fool," Faehmel admits he "savored" his "irony" and kept quiet, even though he knew he *should* have been openly agreeing with her. When he hears four-year-old Heinrich singing "Get your gun, on the run," Faehmel admits he *should* have given him a "good licking" (p. 81), but instead lets him continue singing. It is only when Heinrich recites a war poem that Faehmel finally concedes "that irony wasn't enough, and never would be, that it was only an opiate for a few privileged ones . . ." (p. 90).

Although at this point Faehmel—described by Johanna as "a child" (p. 123)—has come to realize that the individual cannot live apart from the events in history by assuming his superiority to those events and the people causing them, he nevertheless remains to a great extent morally naïve. At the Denklingen station bar, for example, he speaks highly of the café owners, who, Robert pointedly observes, were the same people who tormented Hugo, who possibly executed Ferdi. Demonstrating that despite his sensitivity to the temporal, he remains incapable of making the subtle but necessary moral distinctions required to recognize potential evil, Faehmel merely replies that at *one* time he would have feared anyone.

This same moral naïveté is apparent when Faehmel, like Robert, gets invited to the consecration of the new Abbey. While Robert thinks to himself that he will never be reconciled to the *spirit* of reconciliation

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that blithely ignores the fact that this is still *potentially* "a world in which a gesture or a word misunderstood can cost a life" (p. 228), Faehmel simply thinks that he will not be reconciled to the loss of Otto, that he cannot be reconciled to a building.

Even though experience leads him repeatedly to the same conclusion—that the individual, though not as important as the brotherhood of Lambs, can and must actively resist the evil of the Beast, even if that action is futile—Faehmel remains chronically innocent. Only once does he indirectly resist the Beast's latest incarnation: he makes no attempt to stop Johanna. His last words indicate the limits of his moral growth: "Order is half of life—I wonder what's the other half" (p. 278).

On the other hand, his son Robert knows perfectly well that the other half of life is enduring and absolute value (morality, in other words), and he knows, too, that order is only a precise and reliable method for protecting the Lambs he shepherds. Order, in fact, is closely associated with the character of Robert, but as a concept it has two very distinct meanings. The first is related to the Beast, while the second is the type of order that elevates the individual beyond the purely personal, into a realm of abstraction where he can function as a disinterested moral agent. So that the first is not confused with that element integral to Robert's character, let us briefly examine how order constitutes the framework of the Beast.

Johanna characterizes the form of evil that, in its blind obedience to power, assumes the guise of order, by saying "always everything in an orderly fashion. . . . Dumb as the earth, deaf as a tree, and making sure all the time there was order. Respectable, respectable; honor and loyalty . . ." (p. 139).

Robert, too, describes the character of the Beast by observing that "routine method" is easily understood by "thickheads" (p. 132), but he best captures the simplistic attraction of authority, obedience, and order when thinking about his brother Otto: "Behind that pale, wide forehead had been the will to power in its simplest form, power over timid schoolmates, over passersby who failed to salute the flag. . . . In his brain power had become a formula . . ." (p. 134).

Clearly, Robert's association with routine, order, and formula must be something very different. For one thing, he admits to losing himself "passionately in mathematical formulas" (p. 41). But most significantly, the metaphors employed to describe Robert playing billiards clearly reveal the metaphysical attraction that formula holds for him (p. 31). Indeed, routine, order, and formula are the abstractions that make

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action possible. When he saves Schrella from the brutality of the rounders game, he does so by stalling, by precisely timing his strike according to "formula . . . a little physics" (p. 33), so that the ball, hit beyond the park, would not be found and the game would end. When he explains the principles of demolition to Hugo, his phrase "equilibrium of force" (p. 63) suggests far more than a rule governing statics—it suggests Robert's own attempts to counteract the force of evil by acting on behalf of the Lambs. He admits, in fact, that the demolition of St. Anthony's was for "the lambs no one had fed" (p. 157), that with "dynamite, a few formulas" he had intended to balance the scales weighted with human loss by erecting a monument of "dust and rubble" (p. 156).

Unlike Faehmel, who is highly emotional, Robert remains detached from the personal aspect of relived experience. When he visits the Abbey, for example, he is relieved to find that "memory did not become feeling, remained formula. . . . The heart was not involved" (p. 225). He is detached, too, from the personal element of *current* experience. Ruth and Joseph, his children, are practically strangers to him, and the prospect of spending a half hour alone with his father makes him uncomfortable (p. 153). Moreover, of his marital relationship to Edith, with whom he most shared the deeper bond of moral union, he confesses "he had never thought of himself as a husband . . ." (p. 132).

While his dispassionate nature makes him a less sympathetic character than his father, Robert is, nevertheless, more moral. His primary obligation is not to his immediate family, those blood relations we earlier saw as being tenuous, but to the defenseless Lambs he shepherds. On their behalf, and against the Beast, again and again Robert takes action. Not only does he destroy St. Anthony's, but after the war he advocates the demolition of every historical monument prized by the German people, so that never again will they be tempted to value artifacts over life.

Robert takes action in other ways, also. He was the person who, as a nineteen-year-old, supplied Ferdi with the gunpowder that merely burned Vacano's legs (p. 131), and, like his mother, Robert gave away food. Like Johanna, too, Robert feels the urgency of the past so acutely that he acts on behalf of the future by adopting Hugo. Perhaps the greatest similarity, however, between mother and son is a shared involvement in what Johanna calls the "ephemeral." Billiards, for Robert, is more than routine recreation; it is, instead, as Hugo observes, "a litany struck out across the green felt . . . whywhywhywhy and Lord have mercy on us, Lord have mercy on us" (p. 267). When Robert plays billiards,

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time ceases to be a "measurable dimension" (p. 47), much as it long before ceased, for Johanna, to be a *measured* dimension. Timelessness—whether it be the refusal to acknowledge events outside the sanitarium, or the "infinity" in a "thousand formulas" (p. 47) at the billiards table—is the predominant characteristic of both mother and son. In conjunction with Robert and Johanna, timelessness designates that which is beyond the personal, the private, the emotional: it is the transcendent realm of value that Johanna alludes to in one of her monologues: "I smelled and heard and felt that only the transient has permanence. . . . I longed for the airy white *Host of the Lamb* and tried to beat the ancient heritage of power and darkness out of my breast" (p. 147).

As we have seen, far from rendering Robert incapable of action, this preoccupation with the transcendent makes him all the more aware of the necessity *for* action. This is also true in the case of Johanna. In fact, despite being "stalled" in time by her inability to accept the overwhelming evil of the past, Johanna is even *more* aware of the need to resist the Beast. It was Johanna who publicly called the Kaiser "a fool," who "humbled" Faehmel's sword by using it to dig holes for plants, to "scrape muck from behind the moldings" (p. 125). It was Johanna who gave away food and money, who ripped up her son Heinrich's war poem, who tried to board the trains with the Jews (p. 21), who risked her life by pleading with the authorities to locate and pardon Robert. And it is Johanna who tells Robert it was a "pity" he and Ferdi did not kill Vacano "with a bullet through the head" (p. 122).

It comes as no surprise, then, that Johanna's emergence from the sanitarium results in direct action against the Beast: if Faehmel is the novel's temporal spokesman (who never synthesizes time and morality), and if Robert is the dispassionate shepherd—the novel's overseer, almost—then Johanna is clearly the novel's central agent, the character passionately committed to openly resisting evil. The more thwarted the past, the more urgent it becomes, particularly if what is at stake involves an inviolable concept of goodness.

Because of the future, only the past has been alive for Johanna. With remarks like "September 6, 1958, that's the future, the German future" (p. 151), we are additionally prepared for the novel's climax: when Johanna speaks of the future, we know that action will be entailed, because for Johanna, time is morality, and morality is made real through action. By acting on behalf of the Lambs, Johanna frees herself from immersion in the past, reenters time, and assumes her necessary role in the events that constitute history.

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But besides the inevitability of Johanna's act based on the nature of her own character, evidence exists within the novel suggesting her action is actually necessary. When she is in the hotel room with her husband, she says:

Are you all blind, then? So easily fooled? Don't you see they'd kill you for less than a gesture, for less than a sandwich. . . . I'm scared, old man—I've never felt such a stranger among people, not even in 1935 and not in 1942. (p. 251)

In case there remains any doubt, however, about Johanna's sanity, Böll makes it very clear that her belief regarding the German future is shared by a variety of characters. The menace, in other words, is not in her imagination. The Abbot refers to the "destructive powers which once again are threatening our culture" (p. 228). And Schrella, because he has just returned after years abroad and can therefore observe conditions from a presumably objective point of view, hears from Nettlinger that Vacano is "faithful to the same traditions he followed in 1935" (p. 184), and then is cautioned by Jochen "watch out; sometimes I think: *they did win after all.* Careful. Don't trust this state of affairs" (p. 179).

Once it is established that there is, in fact, a threat to the German future, Johanna's attempted murder of one of the state's most corrupt citizens becomes justifiable according to the moral framework operating within the novel. Neither Ferdi nor she actually succeed in killing Vacano, and this fact both complicates and simplifies the moral issue of the novel. Since Vacano is *not* killed, Ferdi and Johanna remain innocent of actual wrongdoing; they are responsible for intent only, and therefore we are not called upon to justify the taking of one life in order to prevent the occurrence of future evil.⁷

We are, however, expected to sanction that intent. If the character of Faehmel illustrates anything at all, it is that passivity in the face of evil constitutes the worst kind of irresponsibility. Johanna, despite her eccentricity, still acts responsibly by trying to destroy the man who symbolizes past, present, and future danger, and in this way the final gesture of the novel can be understood. Vacano emerges, disappears, and reemerges: he is the shadowy figure behind Nettlinger and all the violence at the beginning of the novel; as the Beast gains power toward the end of the novel, Vacano is once again in the foreground, the symbol of evil, never directly encountered but nevertheless always present. Ferdi's act and Johanna's subsequent reenactment are actually symbolic gestures, futile but necessary acts of symbolic murder, against that evil.

HEINRICH BÖLL'S BILLIARDS AT HALF-PAST NINE

Indeed, all the major acts in *Billiards at Half-past Nine* are symbolic. There is no practical reason why Robert should adopt Hugo: he does so almost to exemplify his role as shepherd and to illustrate the moral precept that one "becomes" a father. Additionally, Robert blows up the Abbey to balance the moral scales tipped in favor of the Beast. But there is another reason only hinted at: although Robert regrets it was his father's creation, by destroying the Abbey, Robert also destroys the symbol of Faehmel's earlier egoism, thereby once again suggesting within the context of the novel that the self-absorbed individual's projects are inconsequential when compared to the events of history.

In *Billiards at Half-past Nine*, time and morality are so related that occasionally they become one subject rather than two, as a consequence of the characteristics they share: both are transcendent realms that become intelligible only *in relation* to each other, and through acts that are largely symbolic. Further, time and morality together constitute a process: both manifest themselves through the events in history, which are, in turn, products of individual (and collective) consciousness. The lesson of time is found in the past; the hope for the future is, as Böll clearly shows, to be found in morality.

¹ All parenthetical page references in the text are to Heinrich Böll's *Billiards at Half-past Nine* (New York: McGraw-Hill paperbacks, copyright © 1962 by Kiepenheuer & Witsch). No translator named.

² For a fascinating discussion of what he terms a novel of "conquering the past," see Robert C. Conard's *Heinrich Böll* (Boston: Twayne, 1981), pp. 129-37. Having visited the Heinrich Böll Archive at the Mugar Library of Boston University, Conard also reveals in his discussion the methods Böll employed (including a colored chart) to keep track of the complicated temporal structure of this novel.

³ In his unpublished dissertation, "Time and Reality in the Fiction of Heinrich Böll," Diss. Rutgers 1967, David Crowner discusses "the flow of time" in Böll's work generally (pp. 126-55). In addition, he exhaustively examines time as a structural element of *Billiards* (pp. 203-22), noting that, for example, the "9:30" of the title corresponds to the nine and one-half hours elapsed during the novel itself. While Crowner observes the "triggers" I call cues, and the "motifs" I call echoing, his point is that these devices create a "close relationship of the past to the present." I argue, however, that they create a temporal and moral coherence that ultimately makes the future Böll's true subject. Gretz's boar, which Crowner observes "assists in merging past and future," is instead, I maintain, a symbol of the evil threatening Germany's

⁴ J. H. Reid, in *Heinrich Böll: A German for His Time* (New York: Oswald Wolff Books, St. Martin's Press, 1988), calls *Billiards* a third-person narrative

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"whose narrator has disappeared . . . behind no fewer than ten focalisers" (p. 126). Reid's term "motif" roughly corresponds to what I call echoing, but we claim differences in effect. Böll's repetition of details and phrases creates a sense of timelessness, according to Reid. While I do not disagree, I think that the repetition serves to establish coherence in chaos. When time and morality merge into one subject—Germany's future—timelessness is clearly connected to the similarly "eternal" moral realm.

⁵ In his article, "Escape from Lethe: 'Unforgetting' in H. Böll's *Billiards at Half-past Nine*" (*College Language Association Journal*, No. 4 [June 1986], Jerry Varsava claims that "forgetfulness" is the theme of this novel. Given the moral struggles *Billiards* embodies and the clear relationships that exist between temporal dimensions, it is difficult to see how the present "becomes invisible," as Varsava contends.

⁶ In his excellent article "Time in the Works of Heinrich Böll," James H. Reid concludes that "the moral remains Utopian, objective reality is not altered" (*Modern Language Review*, 62, No. 3 [July 1967], 485). Elsewhere, however, he comments that Heinrich, Johanna, and Robert "take up a position of moral responsibility" (*Heinrich Böll: A German for His Time*, p. 132). This last assessment, which applies specifically to *Billiards*, seems to reflect the relationship between time and morality more accurately than the first, which applies to Böll's work in general.

⁷ J. H. Reid says Johanna's act "has its own moral logic" (*Heinrich Böll: A German for His Time*, p. 127), and Robert C. Conard observes that the "violence of Ferdi, Robert, and Johanna" needs to be distinguished as attempts to "right wrong not do wrong" (*Heinrich Böll*, p. 137).

**THE 1990 TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE
PRIZE IN LITERARY CRITICISM**

Professor David J. Gordon has won this year's *TCL* prize in literary criticism for his essay "Iris Murdoch's Comedies of Unselfing." Claude Rawson, the distinguished author and professor of English at Yale University, who judged this year's entries, writes:

This account of self-transcendence as a central preoccupation in Iris Murdoch's fiction is strongly argued, precisely formulated, and unusually well-documented from the novels, from nonfictional statements by Murdoch, and from some of her sources. Though relatively brief for a study of the entire oeuvre, it is remarkable both for its range of reference to a large number of novels and for its ability to refer throughout to quite specific details and situations within them. The author has been helped by the fact that this novelist's works tend readily to "merge into an oeuvre," so that the "cento approach" is particularly applicable. This does not diminish the flair with which the situation has been assessed and the organizational skill with which the evidence has been marshaled. There is an excellent understanding of Murdoch's relations with other thinkers, especially Plato and Sartre, on whom she has written. The link with Buddhism is very tactfully expounded, and Murdoch's "quarrel with Freud" discussed with intelligence and insight. The perception that Murdoch "has always needed a replacement for the psychological concept of freedom, and has found it in the philosophical or cosmological idea of Chance" is finely perceived, and the comment that her "attempt to convert individual psychology into cosmological myth is obscured . . . by her use . . . of the vocabulary of humanism . . . and . . . by her failure to acknowledge the full ambivalence of her view of magic," is an especially important and subtle perception.

The *Twentieth Century Literature* Prize in Literary Criticism is awarded annually to the author (or authors) of work submitted to the journal during the preceding year which is judged to make the most impressive contribution to our understanding and appreciation of the literature of this century. Nominees are chosen by the editors of *TCL* and members of the journal's editorial board. A different prominent scholar and critic of modern literature serves each year as judge. The prize includes publication in our Summer issue and a total cash award of \$500. All essays submitted to the journal are eligible.

Iris Murdoch's Comedies of Unselfing

Winner of the 1990 TCL Prize in Literary Criticism

DAVID J. GORDON

No novelist writing in English since D. H. Lawrence, not even Aldous Huxley, has pursued the theme of attacking "the ego" with more sustained intensity than Iris Murdoch. But Lawrence and Murdoch are ideologically opposites. In the spirit of Rousseau and Romantic individualism, Lawrence sought the dissolution of a socially derived self-consciousness and attempted to discover a true, pristine self associated with instinctual consciousness. His stance was radical in its subversion of prevailing consciousness but humanistic as well in its replacement of a degraded by an improved idea of what it means to be human. Murdoch, on the other hand, has consistently attacked (most evidently in her essays and reviews) the whole tradition of Romantic, humanistic individualism from the philosophy of Kant to the existentialism current in her youth.¹ Her fiction is almost as bold conceptually as Lawrence's own, though quieter in style and so traditional in form that it reminds us more often of George Eliot and Henry James than of any modern models.² From Plato she has resourcefully assimilated the idea that images are illusions, from Wittgenstein the idea that ultimate truth lies in silence, and from Simone Weil the idea that the ego must be stripped even of the consolation of suffering. Her vision like Lawrence's may be called religious but it derives from a core of humility rather than pride. It reaches out beyond the personal godhead of the Protestant Christianity Murdoch grew up in and approximates the doctrines of Buddhism.³ Murdoch's view of human fate, strongly influenced by the shock of Hitler's war, is, like Buddhism and unlike Protestantism, virtually ahistorical; her unspecified though vaguely mid-twentieth century present

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time is largely cut off from both past and future. In this respect it is quite unlike the historically oriented myths devised by Yeats, Lawrence, T. S. Eliot, and other modernists, which were based on the urgent conviction that civilization was *approaching* a crisis. Although comfortably alluding to established literary classics (Homer, Shakespeare, Dostoyevski, and others), Murdoch is almost like Beckett in seeming to take up a position beyond the end of civilization and to write about and for survivors of some sort of catastrophe that has already taken place and broken the thread of historical continuity.

Her novels often build upon the metaphor of a time-shattering event. Hilary Burde in *A Word Child* refers to the encounter with the man whose beloved wife he had unforgettably killed in an automobile accident as "something terrible [that] happened yesterday, years ago, before the world began."⁴ Charles Arrowby in *The Sea, The Sea* narrates under the rubric of "history" an obsessive tale of "prehistory," which is the tissue of illusion or myth he has made of the loves of his youth. The Nazi horror specifically is often pictured in her novels and treatises as having created some sort of culturally unassimilable trauma or radical displacement, producing, for example, the satanic Julius King of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* or the central figure—and indeed the central action—of her latest novel, *The Message to the Planet*. Many of her fictional plots, moreover, climax in the scapegoat-death of one focal character that creates a new world, a new consciousness discontinuous with the old, for others: one remembers in this way the deaths of Nina in *The Flight from the Enchanter*, Elsa in *The Italian Girl*, Rupert in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, Dorina in *An Accidental Man*, Kitty in *A Word Child*, Titus in *The Sea, The Sea*, Rozanov in *The Philosopher's Pupil*, and Jesse in *The Good Apprentice*. Even the novel that seems to open itself directly to a historical perspective, *The Book and the Brotherhood*, is not really concerned with the historical interplay of will and circumstance but with a meta-historical idea of fate.

Murdoch distrusts what we call history in large part because it is story, and all stories, as she and Beckett both learned from Sartre, are lies. Her first novel, *Under the Net*, manifestly influenced by Sartre, Beckett, and Wittgenstein, tells us that "The whole of language is a machine for making falsehood" and "all stories are lies, consolation"; in a later one, *The Sea, The Sea*, the central character is told that he has made his lifelong erotic obsession "into a story, and stories are false."⁵ (Refined by the idealism of Plato and Weil, this idea turns into the assertion that "the spiritual life has no story,"⁶ a difficult claim for a novelist so interested in that life.) Quite unlike Beckett, Murdoch

commits herself to elaborate plots—plotting is her most conspicuous if not her greatest gift as a novelist—and yet one of her most insistent convictions, expressed not only in fiction but also in the treatise *The Sovereignty of Good*, is that the art of storytelling, for all its revelatory power, is a deceptive magic, a consolatory boost to the ego: “Any story which we tell about ourselves consoles us since it imposes pattern upon something which might otherwise seem intolerably chancy or incomplete” (*SG*, p. 87). There are logical difficulties with this view (since it privileges her myth against myth), which will be taken up later. But it may be that her very commitment to plot serves to deny some uneasiness about the use of a flawed instrument for imagining truth. That is, Murdoch’s excessive reliance on such melodramatic devices as eavesdropping, inculpatory letters, and abrupt or coincidental arrivals; her crowded and sometimes hyper-prosaic expositions; and her occasionally intrusive narrative voice—these flaws can be understood in part as expressing her eagerness to hasten along her story for the sake of the insight into a truth beyond stories that it is capable of revealing.⁷

There are two Platonic axioms embedded in Murdoch’s thought and fiction, and when taken together they make clear the genuine radicalism of her project. The first (expressed most directly in *The Sovereignty of Good*) is that human desire cannot help being drawn toward the good, a transcendent but non-metaphysical reality or truth, validated by our “attempt to see the unself” (*SG*, p. 93). The second, better expressed in her fiction, where belief is put to the test, is that the mind in its relentless egoism habitually mistakes false images of the good (“eidola”) for good itself, so that even the most spiritually advanced human beings, the aspiring saints, cannot escape the dense nets of illusion created by personal desire. She remarked in an interview that no one in her books, except Tallis in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, gets very far with the process of discarding selfishness.⁸ One of her enlightened characters observed that “Being a priest is a long, long task of unselfing.”⁹ For the rest of us, presumably, the task is still more difficult. We live rather absurdly, then, in a state of needing a truth we cannot quite reach, but the predicament is comic rather than tragic because the transcendent good subsists. Murdoch is quite of her age in skeptically associating absolute truth with silence, and frankly accepting the paradoxical goal of a language-destroying language, a myth-destroying myth.¹⁰ Among the novels the strenuously sententious *The Black Prince* best clarifies the nature of this paradox. On the one hand, the protagonist lover/artist (love and art being the only psychological means of transcendence), has been inspired to achieve “the only truth

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that matters," the only truth in fact that is possible. On the other hand, his mentor, Loxias/Apollo, has taught him "the absolute spiritual necessity of silence," so that this "rough magic" of art, however inspired, can but "hover upon the brink of silence" and but teach "an ineffable understanding beyond words."¹¹

Murdoch's idea of Art as a complement or even supplement to Eros is her most important modification of Plato. (It is developed extensively in *The Fire and the Sun*.) Yet in a Platonic spirit, she makes it clear that both moral instruments, Art and Eros, are constantly subject to degradation, to fantasy or illusion. Although bad art draws us away from reality into fantasy, good art makes us confront the real: it may do this equally well by showing "the defeat of human wishes by contingency"¹² or by making us "face up to the world and see the place of necessity in human life."¹³ Similarly love at its best "shocks us into awareness of a separate reality" but too often "subjects others to our mechanism and fantasy" (FS, p. 36).

In any case, language is an imperfect instrument. The hero of her first novel has written a philosophic dialogue called *The Silencer* and is only the first of a number of characters who are radically dissatisfied with (as well as addicted to) speculation, believing in Wittgensteinian fashion that one can't get at the truth with words, that language won't let you describe accurately. The near-saint Brendan Craddock in *Henry and Cato* will give up the teaching of philosophy and go to India because he can "never get to the end of it, never get to the bottom of it, never, never, never. . . . Everything that we concoct about God is an illusion" (HC, p. 398). Her philosopher Rozanov is in fact driven to suicide by the similar realization that philosophy *cannot* tell the truth.

One could say that Murdoch's is an art for the sake of forsaking art. To be sure, the words language and silence that are involved in this paradox can only be tropes or there would be no literature to discuss. But her earnestness in driving image to the point of imagelessness, story to the point of storylessness, is evident enough in the way she handles her spiritually gifted characters. Bledyard in *The Sandcastle* asserts that "the gifts of the spirit do not appeal to the imagination" and, though a painter, has stopped painting.¹⁴ "The chief requirement of the good life," according to James Tayper Pace in *The Bell*, "is to live without any image of oneself."¹⁵ Ann in *An Unofficial Rose* is to others "invisible," "without mystery," lacking "will" and hence "form."¹⁶ Theo casts no charismatic rays or "gaseous tentacles" that trouble the other characters in *The Nice and the Good* but realizes it has not been enough to have given up the love of his teacher in India and become a soft presence among the nice people on the Dorset coast:

IRIS MURDOCH'S COMEDIES OF UNSELFING

Theo had begun to glimpse the distance which separates the nice from the good, and the vision of this gap had terrified his soul. He had seen, far off, what is perhaps the most dreadful thing in the world, the other face of love, its blank face. Everything that he was, even the best that he was, was connected with possessive self-filling human love. That blank demand implied the death of his whole being.¹⁷

In more schematic fashion, Nigel (in *Bruno's Dream*) casts no shadow, Bradley (in *The Black Prince*) remarks that saints have no dramatic sense of themselves, Craddock (in *Henry and Cato*) describes his saintly mother as "almost invisible" (*HC*, p. 394) and James Arrowby (in *The Sea, The Sea*), though he himself risks making renunciation into drama, observes that "the good are unimaginable" (*SS*, p. 445). And Jenkin in *The Book and the Brotherhood* seems like Theo to absorb rather than radiate egoism: he caught the sharpness of Gerard's painful thoughts "as in a soft bandage," but the worldly Gulliver Ashe "had never been able to see the point of Jenkin."¹⁸

The exception to this rule of unassertive saintliness is the fascinating figure of Tallis in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. Although his diabolical opposite finds him a "strange little person" who looks as if he lived on a "toadstool,"¹⁹ he acts decisively at key moments as well as bearing enormously the sins of his world, and he is an object of considerable if unusual interest to the others, including Julius King himself. Moreover, he occupies a central space in the story whereas most of Murdoch's saints are placed somewhat to the side of the main action. But Tallis is an exception because *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, as Murdoch herself admitted, is frankly "a theological myth," a "theological allegory," "a religious allegory."²⁰ "Tallis is a symbolic character; it's his job, as it were, to be good. You tend to think that a good character is not strong, but Tallis is strong."²¹ I suspect in fact that she has not attempted to repeat this characterization because she found Tallis too interesting, too nearly a genuine Christ figure and, as such, more emblematic of a consolatory, redemptive suffering than of the death of egoism.²²

One of her most diligent critics, Peter Conradi, expresses some surprise that Plato is such a contemporary figure for Murdoch.²³ This is indeed surprising because she clearly values in Plato a notion of transcendence that is hardly à la mode either in philosophy or in literature. Of course, she would have us understand transcendence experientially rather than metaphysically, but she does occasionally lean pretty far across the threshold of the supernatural. Does James

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Arrowby walk upon the water in order to save his brother Charles from drowning? It seems so, and Murdoch herself in interviews did not discourage the idea.²⁴ Are the stigmata that Anne Cavidge receives from her vision of Christ an extraordinary psychosomatic phenomenon or a piece of outright supernaturalism? *Nuns and Soldiers* equivocates. Does Edward Baltram, the good apprentice, literally see his father looking back at him from under the water or is this only a very forceful hallucination? Does Marcus Vallar in *The Message to the Planet* possess supernatural power in bringing a man back from a state tantamount to death according to medical science? As Harold Bloom remarks, unlike García Márquez, "she tends not to be able to sustain [the] mixed mode" of phantasmagoric and naturalistic realism.²⁵

Murdoch calls herself a moral psychologist, and the word psychologist is justified in that her richly textured novels are committed to tracing the tortuous course of erotic illusion. She approves the concept of Freud's libido insofar as it resembles Plato's Eros ("What I agree with in Freud is what he frankly says he pinched from Plato"),²⁶ but her moral objective is not greater autonomy of the ego but its death or, better, its flaying. Insofar as her concept of ego is equivalent to Freud's ego-defenses, which are scrutinized in psychoanalytic therapy, the strategy is not altogether different, but the idea of a fierce aggression turned therapeutically *against* the ego is foreign to psychoanalysis. Predictably she did not like the idea of a "superego," which ought to signify "a pure moral faculty," that functioned as a primitive "punishing agency" (FS, p. 38). Freud seemed to be interested in a workable human being rather than a good one.

Early and deeply influenced by Simone Weil, Murdoch carries this vision of a chastened will to an extreme that she herself knew would seem to some masochistic.²⁷ Her favorite image for picturing the process of unselfing is the myth of Apollo flaying Marsyas, the god flaying alive the satyr who entered a flute-playing contest with him and lost. Murdoch is interested neither in the pride of the satyr²⁸ nor the cruelty of the god but the masochistic unselfing required of the person who yearns for contact with a now inaccessible godhead. She imagines a chastisement of the spirit in terms as physical as possible, attempting (as D. H. Lawrence did) to literalize the metaphor of the death of the ego. It is to be "a loss of tissue in the self [that] cause[s] extreme pain."²⁹

Typical of her references to the myth is this exchange in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* between the homosexual lovers, the gentler Simon (who speaks first and last in this passage) and the sterner Axel:

"You're Apollo and I'm Marsyas. You'll end by flaying me."

"That's an image of love, actually. Apollo and Marsyas."

"How do you mean?"

"The agony of Marsyas is the inevitable agony of the human soul in its desire to achieve God."

"The things you know."

"The things you failed to learn at the Courtauld."

"I don't believe it though. Someone is flayed really. And there's only blood and pain and no love." (FHD, p. 41)

Simon's humane resistance to Axel's radical reading is honored within the novel, but it is Axel's view that excites the Murdochian imagination, as the various references to the myth elsewhere in her work make evident.³⁰

Murdoch is at pains both in and out of her fiction to distinguish this self-castigation from the image of the suffering Christ, from Christianity's idealization of suffering. "What one wants is not suffering but truth." "To be a complete victim, may be another source of power." He "shuddered away from [Christianity's] message of anxiety, suffering, personality and guilt." "The false god punishes, the true god slays." "Nothing can be more consoling than [to think that Christ's] suffering can blot out sin, can really erase it completely, and that there is no death at the end of it all." "It's such a selfish activity, suffering. Buddhism treats it with contempt." Christianity, one figure comments scornfully, "changes death into suffering." Another speaks of the defilement of Plato by Augustine, and of "the old lie of Christian salvation." And of course in nonfiction as well, Murdoch will say, for example, that "Suffering and guilt are forms of fantasy."³¹

As this cento of quotation suggests (and we are justified in adopting a "cento approach" to a novelist whose individual works so readily merge into an oeuvre), the dying god-man of Christianity is a misleading image of spiritual advancement because it throws the emphasis on consolation and redemption rather than on a severe annihilation of the ego. In this respect Buddhistic doctrine is to be preferred, although the notion of reincarnation must be discarded as yet another means of cheating death. Renunciation for Murdoch is always of the "self," never of the body only; she seeks not meek powerlessness but non-power, the absence of a dangerous charisma or psychological power over others. But the real danger of physical death may be the only force strong enough to shake the complacent ego.

Death is for Murdoch, as for the weak but touching poet Lucius Lamb in *Henry and Cato*, "the great teacher," the ultimate challenge to self-complacency, and a far more effective means of unselfing than

suffering, which tends to make us more self-involved. "Death is what instructs us most of all. . . . [It is] the great destroyer of all images and all stories. . . . And suffering we know breeds images, it breeds the most beautiful images of all" (*HC*, p. 395). "Death contradicts ownership and self."³² Indeed, "Plato does not say that philosophy is the study of suffering, he says it is the study of death" (*SG*, p. 68). In several novels (*Bruno's Dream*, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, *Nuns and Soldiers*), the long dying of one character provides a kind of constant point of spiritual reference. And in still others (the best example being *The Nice and the Good*) a serious brush with death generates a central figure's profound renunciation and reorientation. Of course, taking a dim view of the human capacity to shake off egotism decisively, Murdoch gives us as well a number of ironic versions of the efficacy of this brush with death: Effingham Cooper in *The Unicorn* reverts to commonplaceness after a moment of insight; Cato Forbes in *Henry and Cato* cannot shake off his guilt in killing the boy whose threats against him were far from idle; and Gerard in *The Book and the Brotherhood* cannot be cured of his self-indulgent Platonic idealism even by the shocking death of a dear friend.

The important point here is that Murdoch would replace the Freudian idea of psychological necessity—of emotional compulsion—with a necessity inherent in the cosmos, and would replace freedom of choice—or freedom from such compulsion—with the equally transcendent (for her, of course, the "deep") idea of accident or chance. The important distinction in Murdoch's thought is not between determinism and freedom but between mechanism on the one hand (which for her includes most of Freudian psychology³³) and, on the other, those linked forces of Necessity and Chance. Mechanism means for her psychological or material causality as opposed to a truly moral causality that includes both Necessity and Chance, that can strike the mind equally as perfect obligation or perfect accident. This is what *The Fire and the Sun* means by concluding: "a finely meshed moral causality determines the fate of the soul." Certainly she is concerned—obsessed even—by motives and minds, and therefore understandably thinks of herself as a psychologist, but her effort (strenuously on view in her handling of George in *The Philosopher's Pupil*) is to separate motives from the matrix of will or choice (such motives are merely aspects of empirical, mechanistic psychology, whether the expositor is Freud, Stuart Hampshire or Sartre³⁴) and explain causation according to the idea of a mythic fate, of powers in the universe beyond the individual will that govern its operation. The spiritually adept Garth and Matthew in *An*

Accidental Man perceive the Murdochian truth that nothing matters very much on the level of personal choice because all that really matters is decided "by whatever deep mythological forces control the destinies of men."³⁵

Given this radically anti-psychological psychology, I think Murdoch's critics, and perhaps even Murdoch herself, misunderstand her connection to Freud, which is in large part quite subversive. I am not thinking only of the numerous cheap shots taken under the cover of fiction, strange enough in a writer whose voice in essays and interviews is characteristically reasonable and temperate. Nor only of the reasoned arguments against psychoanalysis which contain a measure of truth: it generates self-concern, it degrades Eros, it lacks and so cannot account for spiritual purpose, it is too abstract and crude to capture the "complex thereness" of persons. I am thinking also of her extended novelistic portraits of psychoanalysts. The most egregious of these are Francis Marloe in *The Black Prince* and Blaise Gavender in *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*. The fatuous and officious Francis understands nothing of Bradley's agony and ecstasy, and trots out mechanically a risible diagnosis of homosexuality. Blaise is too busy making an unholy mess of his two households to spend any time at all with his patients (one of whom commits suicide), but his personal catastrophes (the death of his wife and his own near-death) so awe his patients that they "cure" them. The psychoanalyst Thomas McCaskerville in *The Good Apprentice* appears to be the exception, but this appearance is deceptive. Despite his intelligence, attentiveness, care, and even Murdochian ideas (he speaks on television about the death of the ego), he is exposed at last as hugging his reputation, seeking power over others, being fooled by his criminal patient: in short, and in contrast to Jessie, a false magician.³⁶ Finally there is the curious chief-psychiatrist in *The Message to the Planet* who seems at first a villain yet eventually reveals his insight that his patient may be a mystic who has somehow (that is, wordlessly) reenacted the experience of the holocaust and thereby broken new spiritual ground.

Perhaps one can most concisely clarify Murdoch's quarrel with Freud by citing her repeated approval of his statement that we do not give up early pleasures, "all we really do is adopt a substitute" (FS, p. 38, for example). Murdoch reads this as confirmation of her own pessimistic belief that it is virtually impossible for us to escape illusion, to turn from Plato's fire, and from the images it illuminates, to his sun. Hence her villain in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* will demonstrate cynically that "human beings are essentially finders of substitutes" (FHD, p. 233).

But for Freud this ability to substitute (for example, to turn away erotically from parents to spouses) is a healthy sign of adaptability.³⁷

Now, when we open ourselves as readers to experience Murdoch's densely woven novels as novels, and are no longer concentrating on the scope and limits of her vision, we become gratefully aware of her humanity and humor, of her skill in dramatizing a variety of compromises between her fierce idealism and her understanding of human weakness and limitation. Conradi comments that her "puritans . . . often take the greatest punishment from the plot, while the pagan hedonists get off most lightly."³⁸ He goes on to instance Dora v. Michael in *The Bell*, Danby v. Miles in *Bruno's Dream*, Simon v. Rupert in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. One could add that toward still other hedonists whose palpable egotism is shrewdly skewered (the Grays in *The Nice and the Good*, Gerda and Forbes in *Henry and Cato*, Gertrude in *Nuns and Soldiers*, Harry in *The Good Apprentice*), she is still generous in allowing their story a happy enough outcome.

In the face of outright innocence, Murdoch like Blake is joyous, though some irony may shape the depiction. Her dogs and children are charming and memorable, and even her adolescents, though beset by sexual desire and hence by incipient adult egotism, may be loved because their will remains essentially naive: one thinks (in *The Nice and the Good*) of Barbara asking Pierce after first coitus, "Was that really it? . . . Are you sure you did it right?" (NG, p. 348). Or (in *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*) of handsome, troubled David asking randy old Edgar whether he still has sexual fantasies. To be sure, Murdoch also represents very skillfully a scheming adolescent like the ironically named Miranda (*An Unofficial Rose*), an exploitative ego-tripper like Kiki St. Loy (*The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*), and a destructive neurotic like Peter Foster (*A Fairly Honourable Defeat*). Of her innocent adults the pagan Dora in *The Bell* is perhaps the first notable instance, and nothing is lovelier in early Murdoch than the slow finale where, instead of busily tying up plot ends, the author allows Dora and Michael, after their ordeals, to discover quietly the nature of their true vocations. Later examples are Colette Forbes (*Henry and Cato*), Emily McHugh (*The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*), and Daisy (*Nuns and Soldiers*). In the latter two cases, salty speech and seeming possessiveness do not conceal the basic harmlessness and unpossessiveness of the character. One might add Tim Reede, also from *Nuns and Soldiers*, who, despite his easy egoism reprehended by the ascetic Anne, is saved from moral greed by his delight in his artistic gift for mere perception of the physical world. We are told that his unpossessiveness creates a space

around him, precisely what Murdoch says the authentically good person manages to do.³⁹

The novels usually treat generously as well those figures who come to realize that they have overextended themselves morally and are not cut out to be spiritual heroes—Michael in *The Bell*, Monty in *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*, Ducane in *The Nice and the Good*, Simon in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, Henry in *Henry and Cato*. But if they are not granted this humbling insight (like Harriet in *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* who “had no heroism” “for a situation where she was not needed”⁴⁰), even a heroic death—covering and saving a child during an airport massacre—can appear a grotesque form of punishment. And even if they are finally granted insight, like Matthew in *An Accidental Man*, Murdoch can show us what a mess they make in the meantime.

Toward her most obvious villains Murdoch is rather less harsh than one might expect, presumably because they pass such decisive judgment upon themselves, being at bottom wrestlers with God. Nick in *The Bell* and Carel in *The Time of the Angels* kill themselves appropriately. Julius King seeks throughout his story a just judge, and comes before Tallis, as Satan comes before God in *Job*, to ask whether his cynical view of human nature is not justified; he is not destroyed but is directed to clear out, though in the nature of things he will turn up again.

Undoubtedly Murdoch is most harsh toward those intellectual figures who spout a moral philosophy patently resembling her own. Marcus in *The Time of the Angels* wants to write a book on moral philosophy along Murdochian lines yet proves to be a woefully timid moralist who fears that the Bishop's Kierkegaardian Christianity has “taken away the guarantees.”⁴¹ Well-meaning Rupert Foster in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* is writing a Platonic book of moral philosophy which even subscribes to the “power of goodness” in the absence of God (FHD, p. 359), but is complacent in his self-satisfaction and thoroughly destroyed. Rozanov has written a book with the same title as one of Murdoch's essays, “Nostalgia for the Particular,” and is obsessed by the inability of philosophy to capture the concrete truth of the moral life, yet is shown to be a monstrous manipulator who mercifully kills himself. Thomas McCaskerville speaks wisely on television about the death of the ego, but his own egotism and impotence as a healer are exposed. And the Platonist Gerard (in *The Book and the Brotherhood*) is treated extensively with what finally is a pseudo-sympathy because of his tendency toward abstraction in thought and personal relations; indeed the sympathy with which he is treated masks an unpleasant contempt

when we discover at last that his deepest attachment has been all along to a parrot lost in childhood.

Like Sartre, the subject of her first published book, Murdoch has a horror of abstraction, all the more keen for both, one supposes, because they must have realized that their own thinking was abstract, despite their effort to concretize it in fictional forms. Their work often reads like an attempt at self-exorcism. For Murdoch, the only paths to the good are love and art, yet it is precisely love and art that impede and contaminate. This is not to deny that the good is *there*, only that the nets of illusion are so subtle and strong as to make the apprehension of pure particular otherness, in life or in language, verge on the impossible.

Since art is after all Murdoch's necessary mode of representation, her ambivalence toward art helps to explain the complex position of a number of other crucial characters in her fiction who are said to be demons or magicians, for which another name is artist—from the early Mischa Fox and Honor Klein down through Jesse Baltram, David Crimond, and Marcus Vallar in her three most recent novels. These figures exert a spellbinding influence on the susceptible, but Murdoch's repeated disowning of the magic such figures embody does really hold down some opposite attraction to them. Partly this is because such characters are guilty not so much of immoral actions as of constituting temptations to which others yield. But the more basic reason for the ambivalence has to do with the fact that this magic is but another name for the art that Murdoch inescapably practices. To support her usually negative view of magic, Murdoch insists that true art is not inexorably controlled like magic but messy, lifelike, full of what she likes to call "contingency." It will become clear that this contingency or Chance is the flip side of Necessity in her scheme of mythic or moral causality, but she strenuously attempts to establish it by claiming that life itself is messily comic rather than inexorably tragic.

One does not "err willingly," we are twice told in *The Fire and the Sun* (pp. 64, 81). "I think people are pretty bad on the whole, not bad in the sense of wicked but in the sense of selfish and so on, selfishness is absolutely ingrained in human beings," she told one of her audiences.⁴² That is, evil is not perversity of will but a kind of mechanism, and the very vocabulary we use to describe the motives of evil actions—envy, anxiety, ignorance, greed, revenge, guilt—merely *veil* reality (*FS*, pp. 46–47). Death itself is non-tragic, not because in Dantesque fashion there is an ultimate love and justice but because a tragic view would imply a consoling shape, an ultimate redemption of time, whereas life "may be terrible, but it is absurd and shapeless."⁴³

It is probably significant that the novel coming closest to a true tragic rhythm, *A Word Child*, in which disastrously destructive behavior is repeated in spite of some effort by and for the protagonists to avert it, asserts toward the end that what happened was "not a tragedy. . . . Tragedy belongs in art. Life has no tragedies" (WC, p. 382). The great deaths in literature, she suggests, instancing Shakespeare's Shallow and Silence and Dostoyevski's Stefan Trofimovich, "join this sense of absolute mortality not to the tragic but to the comic" (SG, p. 87). Again, "all good tragedy is anti-tragedy . . . Lear wants to enact the false tragic, the solemn, the complete. Shakespeare forces him to enact the true tragic, the absurd, the incomplete."⁴⁴

As this implies, Murdoch is not content to assert that life is more comic than tragic but also that the novel, as distinguished from the drama, is inherently a "comic form."⁴⁵ "Tragedy . . . depends on certain limitations which a novel can't have. The novel is always comic."⁴⁶ "The novel belongs to an open world, a world of absurdity and loose ends and ignorance"; indeed, "a novel which is not at all comic is in great danger aesthetically speaking."⁴⁷ She likes the novel, in other words, because as an "inclusive genre"⁴⁸ it can contain so many messy particulars, so much contingency, so much "heterogeneous stuff" as Anne Cavidge of *Nuns and Soldiers* puts it, expressing her admiration for *Little Dorrit* (NS, p. 104).

There is evidently a logical complication here since the novel as well as the drama is an artifice and at best only an imitation of the heterogeneity and randomness of life itself. It may be a looser form but it cannot lack form and can only *imitate* randomness. The complication is epitomized in that Sartrean word contingency, dear to Murdoch from the beginning of her career and the most difficult concept in her work. Her first novel makes a somewhat facetious distinction between the necessary and contingent parts of London, and *The Sovereignty of Good* asserts with grander sweep that "the good exists necessarily and everything else exists contingently" (SG, p. 63). In "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," contingency is associated, too broadly, both with the messiness of the real that is resistant to the mythmaking ego and with the precious particularity of others: indeed, it is called "the essence of personality."⁴⁹ Thus the idea of accident or chance overlaps somehow with the idea of free or autonomous characterization. Conradi comments too simply that Murdoch's "contingency" denotes the heterogeneity of "history," which she sanely tolerated unlike the great modernists who tried to redeem the horror of contingency through myth.⁵⁰ Yes, but it is also, for her, "essential to the imagination" because

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it is “destructive of fantasy” and allows us to see beyond the self to the reality of others.⁵¹

Since about 1968, she has used the word to denote especially the amount of (seeming) accidentalness or chance that the novel as a form is able to embody. It has led her to welcome diffuse centers of interest, displaced motivation and point of view. (*An Accidental Man* and *The Philosopher's Pupil* are the fullest experiments along these lines.) And it has led her to hope that she has thereby come closer to creating free or autonomous characters, in emulation of Shakespeare and Tolstoy, though, to the credit of her good sense, Murdoch has ruefully acknowledged in a number of interviews that, much as she aspires to create independent characters, her strong plots have a way of constraining their freedom.⁵²

I should like to pursue the revealing connection Murdoch makes between contingency and freedom, since I do not agree that she “is fully aware of the ironies involved in . . . sculpting contingency.”⁵³ She has never liked the idea of freedom insofar as freedom means choice, freedom of the will. “Freedom of will,” one character in *The Sandcastle* tells us, “is not a virtue. Real freedom is the total absence of concern for self.”⁵⁴ “We are all prisoners,” says another in *The Unicorn*, “but the name of our cure is not freedom. . . . Good is [not] a matter of choosing.”⁵⁵ “Freedom is not choosing,” we read in one of her essays; “Freedom is knowing and understanding and respecting things quite other than ourselves.”⁵⁶ But what then is a free character? The fact is that, just as Murdoch needed a replacement for the psychological concept of determinism and found it in mechanism, she has always needed a replacement for the psychological concept of freedom, and has found it in the philosophical or cosmological idea of Chance, the other face of Necessity: “The only genuine way to be good is to be good ‘for nothing’ in the midst of a scene where every ‘natural’ thing, including one’s own mind, is subject to chance, that is, to necessity” (SG, p. 71).

We can say, then, that Murdoch’s religious vision, though nurtured on Protestantism, becomes the perfect antithesis of seventeenth-century, Miltonic Protestantism. Milton’s God, who so highly values human will, reason, and choice (see *Paradise Lost* III.108) also speaks of his own “goodness” as “free / To act or not, Necessity and Chance / Approach not me, and what I will is Fate” (VII.171–73). Milton’s Christian logic, purveyed by a schoolmasterish God, may require a kind of doublethink, at least to the modern secular mind, but it is clear that for the poet human dignity and divine power are not at all incompatible.

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He imagines a God whose respect for freedom excludes both Necessity and Chance, the alternative modes of mechanism or compulsion.

For Murdoch, on the other hand, despite her principled respect for persons (and her liberalism on most social and political issues), human motives ideally derive either from Necessity or Chance, from a perfect obedience of the will to the sovereignty of good or a perfect tolerance for incurable chaos. The saintly Ann Peronett in *An Unofficial Rose* operates from a pure sense of being compelled, not at all from will or choice (*UR*, p. 337). Tallis in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* sits in the mess of his kitchen and unresolved dilemmas—Involving wife, father, lodgers, dead sister—and “grieved blankly over something which seemed, in its disastrous compound of human failure, muddle and sheer chance, so like what it all was” (*FHD*, p. 443). His exasperated but fair-minded sister-in-law remarks, “wherever Tallis is there’s always a muddle. Then she thought, this is unjust. Wherever there is a muddle, there Tallis is” (*FHD*, p. 178).

I think this attempt to convert individual psychology into cosmological myth is obscured in her work by her use, in special senses, of the vocabulary of humanism (love, truth, freedom) and perhaps above all by her failure to acknowledge the full ambivalence of her view of magic, which is to say of power, which is to say of her own power as an artist. In interviews Murdoch is comfortable in referring to her traditional narrative stance as authoritarian, as if she can keep her will distinct from the imagined will of her characters. But she does get involved with the leading questers in her novels, and of these I think Edward Baltram in her last novel but two, *The Good Apprentice*, achieves the fullest insight into his creator’s ambivalence toward magic and hence art:

Everything that happened must have been what Jesse wanted. Of course I’m thinking about it in two quite different ways, thought Edward. In a way it’s all a muddle starting off with an accident: my breakdown, drugs, telepathy, my father’s illness, cloistered neurotic women, people arriving unexpectedly, all sorts of things which happened by pure chance. At so many points anything being otherwise could have made everything be otherwise. In another way it’s a whole complex thing, internally connected, like a dark globe, a dark world, as if we were all parts of a single drama, living inside a work of art. Perhaps important things in life are always like that, so that you can think of them both ways. Of course one *works* at things in one’s mind, one doesn’t want to think that what happens “does nothing” or “doesn’t matter,” as if it was wasted, it’s much more comforting if it’s part of one’s fate

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or one's deep being somehow. Perhaps that working is a kind of magic, like what made Stuart run away. It's dangerous, but I don't see how we could get on without it. . . . I did find my father, thought Edward, and he was a magician. Is magic bad? Stuart would think so. It was as if a storm raged about Jesse, but in the middle of the storm it was calm . . . *he* has done me no harm, only good. (pp. 517-18)

Being within the world of the novel a real person, Edward thinks of the events of his life that brought him finally to an appreciation of his charismatic artist father and a relief from the guilt of his act of negligent homicide as having occurred by two quite different means, either by pure chance (accident, muddle) or by a hidden but intricate internal connection. The latter form of causation, he tells us, we try to connect with our choice and will ("one *works* at things in one's mind"), and it is significant that he had to put aside the counsel of his psychoanalyst uncle, a pseudo-magician, to do so properly, but it is really a fate or necessity beyond one's power, as much as if it occurred by pure chance. This necessity, Edward understands, is "like living inside a work of art," and so is really equivalent to the choice of the artist-magician who conveys an insight into this truth. The magic that Murdoch so frequently renounces is understood at last as something she cannot renounce, for the work of art is the same as Edward's insight into the development of his "real-life" story. Jesse is significantly the only "magician" in Murdoch's universe of many magicians who is fully loved, whose charisma is seen as ultimately benign: "I don't see how we could get on without it." And Edward too may be unique. As Harold Bloom comments, "*The Good Apprentice* seems an advance upon all of Murdoch's previous novels, even *The Black Prince*, because the morally ferocious Platonist finally allows herself a wholly sympathetic protagonist in the self-purging Edward."⁵⁷

When the creating artist herself is put directly in the picture, she can no longer see chance and necessity as separated from the will, indeed from the will to power over the text in question, however dearly the vision of a will-less individual psychology has been cherished. It is significant, I think, that in a treatise written about the same time as this novel, *Acastos: Two Platonic Dialogues*, Murdoch has allowed the severe Platonic view of art, urged by a character named Plato, to be met and finally offset (in the "Dialogue about Art") by the more humanistic and even consolatory figure of Socrates, who actually tells us that, since we are all storytellers and are so nourished, "we should not be too hard on ourselves for being comforted by art."⁵⁸

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But this fine ambivalence crumbles again in *The Book and the Brotherhood*, which tries but does not succeed in showing us that this distinctive vision of fate, this myth, is not simply the world inside a work of art but the truth about the world beyond, about history and the way we live now in the decline of the liberal tradition challenged by a severe Marxist absolutism. Crimond sees only utopian (or apocalyptic) determinism, and Gerard, in parallel opposition, rejects conventional history in favor of absolute values and the determinism of *amor fati*. As Michael Levenson points out in a keen review of the novel, "Marxism is not her subject, but her pretext." The three crucial figures of the novel he aptly names the Platonist (Gerard), the Existentialist (Crimond), and the Mystic (Jenkin)—none of whom is really grappling with the recalcitrant mass of historical data. The abundance of realistic detail, sometimes applied with melodramatic extravagance, largely serves the theoretical purpose of proving that other people exist, "the most important thing the novel can reveal." But, adds Levenson, "for all Murdoch's commitment to realism, inside fiction is where she really dwells. Her stated position is that the novel should be like life, but her underground desire is that life should be like her novels: intellectually adventurous and morally severe."⁵⁹ This is not meant as mere depreciation, but it calls attention to Murdoch's persistent tendency to fold reality into art and hence to her difficulty in maintaining a steady view of the magical power of art. I take it that her strenuous repudiations of magic serve to deny her awareness of this tendency, to conceal her impulse to protect reality from itself by enclosing it in a world of art. So concerned with the freedom of the characters, she nevertheless tends to impose her artistic will upon them. An early polemic against "the ruthless subjection of the characters to the will of their author" in modern literature must finally be seen, I think, as an injunction directed at a tendency she perceived in herself.⁶⁰

But this very readiness to struggle against the self in herself is I think the clue to what is strongest in Murdoch, not simply the plotting of the novels but the extended reflective passages assigned to characters who are themselves struggling, for the most part unsuccessfully, against their egoistic inclinations. A kind of saintliness, intimated by some of her characters, may be her moral goal, but her central novelistic concern, inevitably comic for all its seriousness, is the rationalizing error one falls into in the very effort of trying to be good, the false images and mistaken alleys that beset and complicate our path to the truth. Her theme is indeed unselfing but her art is, however gravely, a form of comedy.

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¹ One of her two central critical treatises speaks of Kantian man as "free, independent, lonely, powerful, rational, responsible, brave, the hero of so many novels." See *The Sovereignty of Good* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), p. 80. In the other, the idea is developed that Kant, especially the Kantian sublime, was betrayed by the Romantics. See *The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), p. 20. Subsequent references to these works are cited parenthetically in the text as SG and FS, respectively.

² In one interview Murdoch commented, "I personally feel much closer to Dickens and Dostoevsky than I do to James Joyce and Virginia Woolf," and recognized as forebears "Jane Austen, Dickens, Dostoevsky, Tolstoi, James." See Jack I. Biles, "An Interview with Iris Murdoch," *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 11 (1978), 121. In another she declared her desire to be "a realistic writer in the tradition of the English novel." See Michael Bellamy, "An Interview with Iris Murdoch," *Contemporary Literature*, 18 (1977), 139. And in another she remarked, "I would like to be influenced by Tolstoi. But the only person I'm certain has influenced me is Henry James." See W. K. Rose, "An Interview with Iris Murdoch," *Shenandoah*, 19 (Winter 1968), 19–20.

³ She treats the subject of Buddhism rather shyly in formal writings, less so in informal comment. Here is a sampler of the latter. "I feel now that I don't have to . . . believe in a personal God in order to have religion—after all Buddhists don't believe in a personal figure like this. Buddha is an image of spirituality, a teacher, and a centre of spiritual power, and I would want to regard Christ in this sort of light, the Buddha of the West." See Caen, "Rencontres avec Iris Murdoch," Jean-Louis Chevalier, ed., *Centre de Recherches de Littérature et Linguistiques des Pays de Langue Anglaise*, Université de Caen, France (1978), pp. 77–78. "I used to think . . . that religion was something childish or gone, but now I feel at some new understanding of it—a Buddhist understanding perhaps." See Simon Blow, "An Interview with Iris Murdoch," *Spectator*, 25 Sept. 1976, pp. 24–25. Buddhism is "a very good kind of religion in that it's not dogmatic and it has very much to do with change of consciousness." See Bellamy, "An Interview," p. 134. "I hold no dogmatic religious belief at all, but I feel now close to certain religious attitudes which are most easily expressed in Buddhist terms for me, though I am not a Buddhist." See Christopher Bigsby, in Heide Ziegler and Christopher Bigsby, eds., *The Radical Imagination and the Liberal Tradition: Interviews with English and American Novelists* (London: Junction Books, 1982), p. 212.

⁴ Iris Murdoch, *A Word Child* (New York: Penguin Books, [1975] 1986), p. 233. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as WC.

⁵ Iris Murdoch, *Under the Net* (New York: Viking, [1954] 1964), pp. 62, 88; Iris Murdoch, *The Sea, The Sea* (New York: Viking, 1978), p. 335. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as UN (*Under the Net*) and SS (*The Sea, The Sea*).

⁶ Iris Murdoch, *The Unicorn* (New York: Penguin Books, [1963] 1986), p. 268.

⁷ Frank Kermode made a similar point when he commented: "Why is the [expository] biographical detail handled with such farcical briskness? Because there is no time to be lost in getting everyone thrown into the great centrifuge of love." See "Bruno's Dream," in Harold Bloom, ed., *Iris Murdoch: Modern Critical Views* (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), p. 23.

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⁸ Bigsby, *The Radical Imagination*, p. 220.

⁹ Iris Murdoch, *Henry and Cato* (New York: Penguin Books, [1976] 1977), p. 173. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *HC*.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Dipple comments that Murdoch's novels are "studies in the impossibility of their own ambitions" and, again, that "No contemporary writer struggles more ironically and ferociously against the impossibility of art than Iris Murdoch." See Elizabeth Dipple, *The Unresolvable Plot: Reading Contemporary Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 186; and Elizabeth Dipple, *Work for the Spirit: The Novels of Iris Murdoch* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 4. This picture of the fiercely uncompromising artist is a half-truth about Murdoch; the other half is expressed by Peter Conradi, who speaks of her "sweet sanity," her appreciation of human innocence and comedic tolerance for human imperfection. See Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: The Saint and the Artist* (New York: St. Martin's, 1986), p. 100.

¹¹ Iris Murdoch, *The Black Prince* (New York: Viking, 1973), pp. 155, 340–41, 366. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *BP*.

¹² Quoted as epigraph in Jan Garden Castro, *The Art and Life of Georgia O'Keeffe*. From a lecture delivered by Iris Murdoch at Washington University in St. Louis, April 2, 1972.

¹³ Derwent May, "Iris Murdoch's Best Seller in the Swim," *Observer*, 26 Nov. 1978, p. 12.

¹⁴ A. S. Byatt reminds us that Bledyard has stopped painting, implying that Murdoch only partially endorses his statement. See A. S. Byatt, *Degrees of Freedom: The Novels of Iris Murdoch* (London: Chatto, 1965), p. 67. I am not sure this is true about *The Sandcastle*, but it is certainly true that elsewhere, notably in *The Fire and the Sun*, art is understood to be, for all its imperfection, our most valuable instrument of spiritual truth.

¹⁵ Iris Murdoch, *The Bell* (New York: Penguin Books, [1958] 1986), p. 131.

¹⁶ Iris Murdoch, *An Unofficial Rose* (New York: Warner Books, [1962] 1973), pp. 20, 29, 38.

¹⁷ Iris Murdoch, *The Nice and the Good* (New York: Penguin Books, [1968] 1986), pp. 359–60. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *NG*.

¹⁸ Iris Murdoch, *The Book and the Brotherhood* (London: Chatto, 1987), pp. 52, 139. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *BB*.

¹⁹ Iris Murdoch, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (New York: Penguin Books, [1970] 1986), p. 85. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *FHD*.

²⁰ Bellamy, "An Interview," p. 135; Caen, "An Interview," p. 75; Bigsby, "An Interview," p. 229.

²¹ John Haffenden, "John Haffenden Talks to Iris Murdoch," *Literary Review*, 58 (1983), 34.

²² *The Message to the Planet* attempts to put a kind of saint at the center of a long novel, but it is difficult for us to see Marcus Vallar's life as, at one and the same time, mystically purposeful and absurdly incoherent, in large part because we are for so long limited to the understanding of the character called Alfred Ludens, who illuminates neither of these components, let alone their combination. What I have to say later about Necessity and Chance should clarify what Ludens (and Murdoch) fail to express.

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²³ Conradi, *Iris Murdoch*, p. 85.

²⁴ Murdoch addressed this point in one interview by saying, "Charles is not mistaken in thinking that James hauled him out, and James did haul him out." ["By standing on the water?"] "Yes, or something, yes." See Bigsby, *The Radical Imagination*, p. 214.

²⁵ Harold Bloom, ed., *Iris Murdoch: Modern Critical Views*, edited with an introd. by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), p. 1.

²⁶ Haffenden, "John Haffenden Talks to Iris Murdoch," p. 33.

²⁷ In 1956, Murdoch clarifies the importance for Weil of waiting and attention rather than act or choice, and acknowledges that some readers may find a repellent, self-destructive quality in her. See Iris Murdoch, "Knowing the Void," *Spectator*, 2 Nov. 1956, pp. 613–14. In 1983, she asserted that Weil was "not life-denying. . . . It requires the most enormous spiritual energy to decreate yourself in this way." See Haffenden, "John Haffenden Talks to Iris Murdoch," p. 34.

²⁸ Richard Todd remarks that "the traditional representation of divine punishment for artistic hubris has, since classical antiquity, been the flaying of Marsyas by Apollo." See Richard Todd, *Iris Murdoch, Contemporary Writers* (New York: Methuen, 1984), p. 21. The statement itself is true enough but he is wrong to imply that this is its meaning in Murdoch.

²⁹ Iris Murdoch, *The Red and the Green* (New York: Penguin Books, [1965] 1988), p. 83. In this connection also, Elaine Scarry comments: "The self-flagellation of the religious ascetic . . . is not . . . an act of denying the body . . . but a way of so emphasizing the body that the contents of the world are canceled, and the path is clear for the entry of an unworldly, contentless force." See Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985), p. 34.

³⁰ Typical is this reference in *The Good Apprentice*: "The entranced face of the tortured Marsyas as Apollo kneels lovingly to tear off his skin, prefigures the death and resurrection of the soul." See Iris Murdoch, *The Good Apprentice* (New York: Viking, 1985), p. 78. The image runs throughout *The Black Prince*; for example, in Bradley's reading of *Hamlet*, Shakespeare's famous impersonality is said to be in maximal tension with an intense self-reflectiveness, hence "a complete self-castigation in the presence of the God." See *The Black Prince*, p. 116. See also, among other references, *Henry and Cato*, pp. 71, 120, 198.

³¹ See Iris Murdoch, *The Italian Girl* (New York: Penguin Books, [1964] 1985), p. 41; *The Unicorn*, pp. 98–99; *An Accidental Man* (New York: Warner Books, [1971] 1973, p. 141; *The Black Prince*, p. 301; *A Word Child*, p. 291; *Henry and Cato*, p. 79; *Nuns and Soldiers* (London: Chatto, 1980), p. 66; *The Book and the Brotherhood*, p. 25; *The Sovereignty of Good*, p. 68.

³² Iris Murdoch, *Bruno's Dream* (New York: Dell, 1969), p. 128. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *BD*.

³³ Cf. "The problem is [not determinism. It is] that so much of human conduct is moved by mechanical energy of an egocentric kind. In the moral life, the enemy is the fat, relentless ego." See *The Sovereignty of Good*, p. 52.

³⁴ *The Sovereignty of Good* explains that so-called freedom of choice or freedom of the will applies to only a small area of our mental activity. Murdoch likes to quote Sartre's "When I deliberate the die is already cast," as a way of suggesting that, in the process of so-called choice, "the forces which are dark to

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me have already made the decision" (*ibid.*, p. 36). With a twist of Simone Weil, the idea turns into this: "If I attend properly I will have no real choices and this is the condition to be aimed at" (*ibid.*, p. 40).

³⁵ Murdoch, *An Accidental Man*, pp. 124, 469. It is worth noting in this novel how Murdoch's Matthew explains why the unlikely Ludwig becomes a moral hero in spite of any intention to be one: "If anything isn't just psychology this isn't.... God would live here if God existed" (p. 464).

³⁶ Dipple sees qualified authorial approval of him rather than, as I do, veiled contempt: "although Murdoch usually satirizes psychoanalysts in her novels, Thomas comes across as an equivocal character whose drive for power is mediated by a desire to interpret validly and effect a meliorization." See *The Unresolvable Plot*, pp. 203–04.

³⁷ Dutifully following Murdoch, Conradi makes the same error, thinking that Julius is illustrating here a Freudian truth that Murdoch endorses (*Iris Murdoch*, p. 83). And in general he overrates or mistakes Freud's influence on her—misleadingly equating, for example, Plato's fire, in the parable of the cave, with Freud's ego (p. 127). Misunderstanding of this point is compounded in Anatole Broyard's "Iris Murdoch Makes It Fun to Be Smart," *New York Times Book Review*, 5 Oct. 1986, p. 13. Broyard writes: "In one of her books a character says that 'human beings are essentially finders of substitutes.' There's a lovely pathos in that idea, just the opposite of the American slogan, 'Accept no substitutes.' Wouldn't we all be happier if American novelists occasionally let their characters accept a few substitutes?"

³⁸ Conradi, *Iris Murdoch*, p. 67.

³⁹ The egoism of the good artist is a complex affair for Murdoch, as perhaps for any thoughtful person. On the one hand s/he is supremely selfless, concerned with serving art rather than personal needs. On the other, s/he is primarily concerned with serving the self that creates art and may even be obsessed with self-representation. The admiring comments on Max Beckmann's happily complacent egoism in *Henry and Cato* are to the point here.

⁴⁰ Murdoch, *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*, p. 270.

⁴¹ Iris Murdoch, *The Time of the Angels* (New York: Penguin Books, [1966] 1987), pp. 94–95. Significantly, *A Word Child* (p. 384) quotes from the opening lines of T. S. Eliot's "Burnt Norton" about the unredeemability of time without indicating in any way that the statement is reversed at the end of the poem.

⁴² Caen, "Rencontres," p. 90.

⁴³ Biles, "An Interview," p. 117.

⁴⁴ Iris Murdoch, "Salvation by Words," *New York Review of Books*, 15 June 1972, p. 4. For this reason, Murdoch was inclined to believe, adapting Dostoyevski as well as Plato to her distinctive point of view, that good was a greater challenge for the imagination, if not in a crude sense more interesting, than evil. Guy observes to Anne: "Our vices are general, dull, the ordinary rotten mud of human meanness and cowardice and cruelty and egoism, and even when they're extreme they're all the same. Only in our virtues are we original, because virtue is difficult, and we have to try, to invent, to work through our nature against our nature." See *Nuns and Soldiers*, p. 69.

⁴⁵ Caen, "Rencontres," pp. 74–75.

⁴⁶ Rose, "An Interview," p. 15.

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⁴⁷ Bellamy, "An Interview," pp. 131–32; Bigsby, *The Radical Imagination*, p. 230.

⁴⁸ Iris Murdoch, "Speaking of Writing," *New York Times*, 16 Feb. 1964, p. 15, col. 2.

⁴⁹ Iris Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," *Yale Review*, 49 (1959), 23.

⁵⁰ Conradi, *Iris Murdoch*, p. 81.

⁵¹ Iris Murdoch, "Against Dryness," *Encounter*, 16 (1961), 20.

⁵² "One isn't good enough at creating character. One starts off—at least I start off—hoping every time that . . . a lot of people who are not me are going come into existence in some wonderful way. Yet often it turns out in the end that something about the structure of the work, the myth as it were of the work, has drawn all these people into a sort of spiral, or into a kind of form which ultimately is the form of one's own mind." See Frank Kermode, "House of Fiction: Interviews with Seven English Novelists," *Partisan Review*, 30 (Spring 1963), 63–64. "What I feel my work needs, what makes it less good is that I'm not able to present characters with enough depth and ordinariness, and accidentalness. This has always been a problem for me—my characters get cramped by my story." See Rose, "An Interview," p. 11. "I do regard myself as a realistic novelist . . . trying . . . to create characters who are like real people . . . sometimes plots get in the way." See Caen, "Rencontres," p. 74. "The creation of character is a difficult thing. I'm not particularly good at it. My plot and the kind of central magic are so strong that they tend to draw the characters too much towards the center." See Bellamy, "An Interview," p. 139.

⁵³ Bigsby, *The Radical Imagination*, p. 210.

⁵⁴ Iris Murdoch, *The Sandcastle* (New York: Penguin Books, [1957] 1986), p. 213.

⁵⁵ Murdoch, *The Unicorn*, pp. 97, 99–100.

⁵⁶ Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," p. 270.

⁵⁷ Bloom, *Iris Murdoch*, p. 6.

⁵⁸ Iris Murdoch, *Acastos: Two Platonic Dialogues* (New York: Viking, 1987), p. 63.

⁵⁹ Michael Levenson, "Liberals in Love," review of *The Book and the Brotherhood*, *New Republic*, 6 June 1988, pp. 40–44.

⁶⁰ Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," p. 265.

The Grin of Tiresias: Humor in *The Waste Land*

STEVEN HELMLING

After the torchlight red on sweaty faces
After the frosty silence in the gardens
After the agony in stony places
The shouting and the crying
Prison and palace and reverberation
Of thunder of spring over distant
mountains
He who was living is now dead
We who are living are now dying
With a little patience

(lines 321–30)

These lines introduce “What the Thunder Said,” the climactic last section of *The Waste Land*, the one Eliot regarded as the best part of the poem, and the only possible justification of the whole. The descent they orchestrate—from apocalyptic heights to sardonic mockery in a mere nine lines—is entirely characteristic of the poem’s modus operandi, and sounds a recurrent note of large importance to the poem’s total effect. *The Waste Land* has long seemed a somber poem, and of course it largely is, but the somberness has perhaps been overstressed in the history of the poem’s critical reception. In the succès de scandale following its publication in 1922, the poem’s detractors dismissed it as a joke or a hoax or an obscure satire, and its defenders, in consequence, were obliged to emphasize its seriousness. Yet from the beginning the jokingness of many moments in the poem—Mrs. Porter and her daughter washing their feet in soda water, for example, or that Shakespearian rag—has been evident.

Such effects have generally been characterized in terms of *irony*, but I want in this essay to consider them rather under the rubric of “humour”—a term Eliot himself uses most suggestively in the period

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preceding the composition of *The Waste Land*, as we shall see. "Irony" is a property of situations, and thus accommodates perhaps too well the dogma of "impersonality" with which Eliot diverted attention from some of his profounder meanings and motives. "Humour," by contrast, is a property of persons, which is to say, in *The Waste Land*, a property of the voices the poem makes audible. To consider these moments of jokey desperation as "humour" rather than "irony" helps bring into focus that each such moment emerges from a voice, a persona, an imagined speaker, and thus registers a "humour" in the now latent sense (but a sense of which Eliot was of course aware) of a limiting psychological disposition. The compulsive sarcasm that recurs throughout the poem signals a world of demoralized people trapped in self-defeating psychologies.

Eliot's contempt of Othello's efforts at "cheering himself up" (SE, p. 111; Eliot's emphasis),¹ along with Prufrock's compulsive (but also humorous) way of bringing himself down, license the suggestion that the voices we hear in the *The Waste Land*, insinuating their sly, mordant, self-lacerating jokes, indulge as much as (and perhaps more than) they protest the demoralization they suffer. Their sophisticated (and ostentatiously "literary") sensibilities have only made them, all too lucidly, connoisseurs of their own condition: "humour characters," it is not too much to say, whose "humour" is despair. And the "*hypocrite auteur*"? Here, too, as we shall see, to think in terms of "humour" rather than the distancing and detachment of irony helps focus the extent to which the desperate "humour" of the poem's voices belongs to its author as well, and attaches to his hopes and anxieties (including those connected with the ambition to write poetry, and thus invested in *The Waste Land* itself), as much as to theirs.²

But before proceeding to a consideration of "humour" in the poem, I want briefly to consider it as an aspect of its technique. Eliot's famous avowal in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) that the poet has not a "personality to express, but a particular medium . . . in which special or very varied feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations" (SE, p. 9), suggests a model for the Eliot poem, a verbal field as "medium" in which (to adapt the language of "The Metaphysical Poets" [1921]) "disparate experience" is "amalgamated" into "new wholes" (SE, p. 247). But if "heterogeneity of material compelled into unity" (SE, p. 243) is an imperative Eliot explicitly states, he is less forthcoming about the character of the materials to be thus unified. What seems clear is that they will be not only "disparate," but conflicted. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot commends a

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passage from Tourneur for its “combination of positive and negative emotions: an intensely strong attraction toward beauty and an equally intense fascination by the ugliness which is contrasted with it and which destroys it” (*SE*, pp. 9–10). And later, in his 1936 essay on *In Memoriam*, Eliot remarks the power a poem might derive from “an amalgam of yielding and opposition below the level of consciousness” (*SE*, p. 291).

These arrays of conflicting terms—“yielding and opposition,” “positive and negative emotions,” “beauty” and “ugliness”—remind us that Eliot is the great poet of “modern” ambivalence. Prufrock, wracked by desires he can neither realize nor renounce, is torn between uttering his love song and aborting it; *The Waste Land*—a rewrite of “Prufrock,” but this time with Western civilization as the protagonist—similarly pictures a world vacillating between the comfortable narcosis of deadness and the frightening challenge of coming back to life. “Humour” since long before Freud has been understood as signaling the expression of conflicted and conflicting ideas and emotions; in a sense, “humour” itself may be regarded as a “medium” for “amalgamating disparate experiences.” Eliot’s “Marvell” essay (also of 1921) supplies an important term, related to “humour,” for a literary effect likely to attend a poetry concerned with “amalgamating disparate experience”; the term is “wit,” which Eliot commends as effecting an “alliance of levity with seriousness (by which the seriousness is intensified)” (*SE*, p. 255). This compounding of disparate things registers, Eliot explains, “a recognition, implicit in the expression of every experience, of other kinds of experience that are possible” (*SE*, p. 262). Implicit here is that both the “recognition” and the “expression” will be highly self-conscious—a condition that Eliot in “‘Rhetoric’ and Poetic Drama” (1919) associates with “humour,” for “whenever any one is aware of himself as acting, something like a sense of humour is present” (*SE*, p. 29).

The Waste Land is the poem of Eliot’s that best answers to the hints sounded in these passages: the poem as “medium” in which disparate experiences may confront and combine with each other, held together rather by effects of tone than by structures of syntax, narrative continuity, or a single persona; the conflictedness expressed in “amalgam[s] of yielding and opposition below the level of consciousness”; the sense of being haunted by “other kinds of experience that are possible”; the self-consciousness, and with it the “wit” that only makes these ambivalences more acute. But what none of these passages suggests is the bitterness, even ferocity, of some of the humor in *The Waste Land*. This effect finds its formula in Eliot’s 1919 “Marlowe”

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essay, in which Eliot commends Marlowe's ability to elevate to major stature the devices, emotions, and worldview of what Eliot calls "farce." When Eliot explains that "with the enfeebled humour of our times the word [farce] is a misnomer," he is covertly announcing an ambition to bring this Marlovian intensity back to contemporary poetry. He characterizes "farce" as a "terribly serious, even savage comic humour," which "attains its effects by something not unlike caricature" (SE, pp. 105–06). These remarks suggest how we might understand the meanings and the motives of *The Waste Land*'s moments of humor.

We might take the cruel humor of the epigraph from Petronius as the poem's first such moment—jeering boys asking an enfeebled prophetess in whose power no one any longer believes a mocking question to which her answer is all too candidly the reverse of "oracular"—but within the poem itself humor first appears in the opening section, in a passage thematically linked to the epigraph, in the lines concerning "Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante." Like the Cumæan Sybil in the poem's epigraph, Madame Sosostris is an emblem (and a caricature) of diminished oracular power. But if the Sybil, longing for death, seems an emblem of an exhausted and attenuated civilization no longer able to muster any enthusiasm for its outmoded belief systems, Madame Sosostris is comically, even with her bad cold, thriving on the anxiety and chaos of a culture whose supposed "modernity" should have left her and her kind no opening. If the Sybil suggests the death of faith, Madame Sosostris suggests the continuance, or resurgence—perhaps even the (ironic) "resurrection"—of superstition, credulity, and the human will to avoid "very much reality."

In both images Eliot's own ambitions as poet are implicated: Madame Sosostris' Tarot deck, from which she deals a sequence of images whose meaning it is up to the client to assemble, models the Eliot poetic of juxtaposition and association, and the demands it makes of its readers; more importantly, the power to which the Sybil and Madame Sosostris both lay claim, the power of "prophecy," of potent utterance in a demoralized world, is a power that Eliot as poet, and *The Waste Land* as poem, clearly aspire to. (The aspiration, and the ambivalence, surface most visibly in the famous footnote about Tiresias. Tiresias' claim to have foreknown and foresuffered all finds its "comic" variant not in *The Waste Land*, but in the *weltschmerz* of Prufrock's grandiose, and deluded, "I have known them all already, known them all.")

Since Peacock and Macaulay, the notion that "as civilization advances, poetry almost necessarily declines"³ has exercised great sway in our culture, and some of our most ambitious poets—Yeats, Pound,

Graves—have rebelled against it by affirming prophecy and “inspiration” as self-authenticating manifestations of kinds of human power that the “modern” world is mistaken to think it can either dispense with, or escape. Eliot, more conflictedly, presents the continuance of prophetic power less as the persistence of a perennial vitality, than as a kind of vampirism of the past upon the present that no amount of progress and enlightenment will help us escape. In the place where Yeats sets up his Crazy Jane, Pound his Homer (and Tiresias), Graves his White Goddess, Eliot installs a Sybil who recalls those foolish mortals in ancient myth who won immortality from the gods but forgot to ask for youth, and a charlatan out of the contemporary urban demimonde, a figure of “the underworld” in both its ancient and modern senses (home of the dead and of prophecy; home of the criminal element).

If her “wicked pack of cards” suggests that she traffics as cynically in pornography as in prophetic pretensions, we should recall that just this charge was often leveled in the young Eliot’s literary milieu against “modern” writers like Lawrence, Wells, and Joyce; *The Waste Land*, with its mantic tone, the “bogus scholarship” (as Eliot himself called it [OPP, p. 121]) of its tongue-in-cheek “Notes,” and the sordidness of, for example, the encounter of the typist and the young man carbuncular, of course invites, and received, attack in the very same terms. Madame Sosostris is absurd (“the wisest woman in Europe,” indeed), yet she embodies a potent and persistent desire, even among the sophisticated who can neither believe nor altogether disbelieve in her, for supernatural knowledge and experience. As emblems of prophetic power, both the Sybil and Madame Sosostris stand for something compromised and compromising; and Eliot’s own ambitions as poet, in this very poem, are implicated in that compromise.

I have spoken of “vampirism,” and this theme, of the persistence of something dead yet predatorily alive (“ironic resurrection”), is of course central to *The Waste Land*, and especially to its first section, “The Burial of the Dead.” The famous opening lines register (as Michael Levenson has recently suggested)⁴ the interior monologue of a corpse, a corpse reluctant, amid the painful stirrings of “the cruellest month,” to come back to life. This somber opening of the poem announces a theme resumed, but with grim humor this time, at the close of “The Burial of the Dead”:

There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying: “Stetson!
“You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!
“That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
“Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?

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"Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?
 "O keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,
 "Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!
 (lines 69-75)

The opening of the poem presented a corpse preferring death to life, yet wracked by “memory and desire” and the possibility of resurrection; here, two of the “living” speak of a buried corpse that refuses to stay in its grave. Like so many Eliot protagonists, these two are living in the aftermath of a crisis experience that has changed them, and unfitted them for life as they had lived it before. War veterans who now, in the postwar period, are living the spectral, haunted half-life of the survivor—*The Waste Land* is in part a poem of “survivor guilt”—each wanders “alone in a crowd” through London until their unexpected meeting (“Où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant,” as Eliot’s note reminds us) revives in each all the guilt and horror of their buried dead who refuse to stay buried.

In the opening lines, resurrection is undesired by the dead; here the resurrection of the buried dead is undesired by the living. But more salient than this thematic turn is the contrast in *tone* between the two passages: if the first sounds exhausted and resigned, the reprise pulses with the vitality of a grimly manic humor. The arch tone—in Eliot’s own recording(s) of the poem (listen to the almost Noel Coward-ish reading he gives “That corpse you planted in your garden, / Has it begun to sprout?”) transposes the poem’s profoundest themes, including the “vegetation ceremonies” motifs that were for so long matter for solemn research in Eliot scholarship, into the humorous key in which they are usually treated in popular culture: in murder mysteries, for example, of which Eliot was an avid reader, and horror fiction, which so often features themes of the “return of the living dead.”⁵ It is the tone Eliot exaggerates and purifies, leaving nothing but two-dimensional grotesquerie, in the *Sweeney Agonistes* fragments, in which murder, necrophilia, and cannibalism are the stuff of cockney banter conducted in the jingling rhythms of nursery-rhymes.

The theme-and-reprise (“first time as tragedy, second time as farce”) of “The Burial of the Dead,” then, achieves, to cite Eliot’s formula for “wit,” an “alliance of levity with seriousness (by which the seriousness is intensified).” But what is the “seriousness” this levity is “intensifying”? Eliot’s “wit” here may be said in a general way to express a *contemptus mundi* that readers have always seen in the poem—as if to suggest that even our profoundest dreads and fears (of death, of the return of the dead), like our hopes and dreams (of more life, of

resurrection, of our own redemption from deadness), are vanities, and laughable. Among these hopes and fears must be included our (and Eliot's) investments in literature. I have suggested that Madame Sosostris and the Sybil encode in unempathic ways the conflictedness of Eliot's literary ambitions; the mockery here makes the same motive more visible, but also implicates the reader, and the reader's expectations of literature, as well.

It is the great achievement of *The Waste Land* to acknowledge and to protest, but also somehow to master, the "literariness" of writing and of reading in a self-consciously "modern," and (supposedly) "disillusioned" age.⁶ Earlier I cited Peacock and Macaulay, and here I might mention names as diverse as Dostoyevski, Ruskin, Arnold, Nietzsche, Freud, Rilke, Yeats, Picasso, and Stravinsky, in support of the assertion that Eliot speaks for and to a culture whose pride in its own modernity remains haunted by the anxiety that its sophistication and enlightenment may endanger and corrupt sources of energy and feeling more immediate, spontaneous, and "natural."⁷ What readers and writers expect of each other, and of literature, receives its most savage indictment in *The Waste Land* at what sounds like the poem's most operatically "high" moment: the florid Shakespearean-Keatsian pastiche that opens "A Game of Chess," a passage rich in the quality Eliot elsewhere calls "opacity, or inspissation of style" (*SE*, p. 202), that is, a "local self-consciousness" (*SE*, p. 201), by which verbal effect calls attention to itself at the expense of its subject matter. The passage echoes Enobarbus' famous speech in *Antony and Cleopatra* ("The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne, / Burned on the water"), which Eliot cites in "'Rhetoric' and Poetic Drama" (*SE*, p. 27) as an example of a kind of "rhetorical" self-consciousness that he goes on to connect (as we have seen) with "humour" ("for when anyone is conscious of himself as acting, something like a sense of humour is present" [*SE*, p. 29]).

The opening passage of "A Game of Chess" is not at all "funny"—which helps us see, if we need it, that "humour" need not necessarily be "funny"—but there is about it very much the air of a voice "conscious of [it]self as acting." The performance is the most richly and allusively "literary" in the poem, and the specific resonances, besides *Antony and Cleopatra*, a play conjuring with the temptations and dangers of opulence and luxury, are with such "silver" poets of lush verbal effects as Keats and Virgil. The voice moves so confidently among "literary" echoes as to recall Hugh Kenner's epithet for Eliot, "the invisible poet": it seems to emanate, that is, less from any identifiable speaker than from "literature" itself. In the preening virtuosity of this

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voice, self-conscious "literariness" appears as something like one of the "humours" of literature: a way that the unspeakable can be made not only speakable, but even entertaining—amounting, in effect, less to a protest against horror than an indulgence of it, a sugaring over (or spicing up) of something unpalatable to make it another of those drugs Eliot so distrusts against "very much reality."⁸

To coerce literature away from its servitude to what Eliot calls "this *bovarysme*, the human will to see things as they are not" (*SE*, p. 111), it goes without saying, is a prime motive of all of Eliot's writing, whether in poetry, prose, or drama. In another thirty lines, the poem conducts us into the pub where working-class women discuss adultery and abortion, a passage whose unflinching squalor defies the reader who will protest that this sort of thing is "not poetry" at all. (Such a reader, quite common in the poetry audience of 1922, could be expected to cite the opening of the section as the sort of thing altogether to be preferred.) The trajectory from the "The Chair she sat in" to the women in the pub recalls the quality Eliot admired in Blake: "It is merely a peculiar honesty, which, in a world too frightened to be honest, is peculiarly terrifying. It is an honesty against which the world conspires because it is unpleasant. Blake's poetry has the unpleasantness of great poetry" (*SE*, p. 275). The parodic opulence of the opening passage of "A Game of Chess" mocks the frightened world's "conspiracy" against "unpleasantness," and Eliot means the excess he writes into it as an indictment.

But in the "high" literariness of the passage, as effects of a kind of literary "camp" surround, and blur, the violence and brutality of the Tereus and Philomela tale the passage frames, there is something closer to the ordinary notion of "humour" as well. If bravura literary pyrotechnics sort ill with themes of rape and mutilation, they do so here to underscore the ways self-consciously "literary" treatment distorts its object (a problem Eliot takes up in essays both preceding and following the composition of *The Waste Land*, for example, "Swinburne as Poet" [1920] and "Lancelot Andrewes" [1926]), especially when verbal brilliance is deployed to dress up "unpleasant" subject matter. Eliot's note directs us to Ovid's rendering of the tale, which is an example of the suavely heartless "humour"—sadism as one of the fine arts—that I am describing; Ovid focuses several superlatively stylish lines on the cutting out of Philomela's tongue, closing, as in a cinematic close-up, on an image of the severed tongue whimpering and quivering on the ground at Philomela's feet.⁹ Brian DePalma could not have done it better.

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A similar jokey self-consciousness, a similar “something like a sense of humour” that attends anyone “conscious of himself as acting,” recurs throughout the poem, often at its most allusive moments, when echoes and fragments of the literary past are remembered. That what we remember is often absurd or trivial is a theme sounded, with varying degrees of humor from the affectionate to the sarcastic, throughout the works of the master modernists, from Plumtree’s Potted Meat to “pigeons on the grass, alas!” The humor of *The Waste Land* repeatedly contrives to afflict “high”-culture allusions, mastery of which is the peculiar vanity of the intellectually ambitious, with “low” and mocking caricatures of them that recur like obsessive thoughts. Marvell’s great couplet, to which Eliot called attention in his 1921 essay, “Andrew Marvell” (“But at my back I always hear / Time’s wingèd chariot hurrying near” [SE, p. 254]), is twice travestied in “The Fire Sermon”:

But at my back in a cold blast I hear
The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear.
(lines 185–86)

But at my back from time to time I hear
The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring
Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring.
(lines 196–98)

The first of these two passages turns Marvell’s erotically charged memento mori to the sort of grinning death’s-head image appropriate to Halloween parties, the amusement park’s “Haunted House,” or the decor of Madame Tussaud’s Chamber of Horrors, even as it enlists this tawdriness as emblem of the genuine “horror” and “boredom” the poem is so concerned with; the second transposes the pastoralism of Joan and Darby to the urban or suburban settings where the petty bourgeoisie, reveling in the new liberty afforded by the automobile, pursues what Eliot regarded as its comic-awful *amours*. (A similar effect, but rather grim than “funny,” attends the citation of Spenser’s “Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song” as ironic comment on the foulness of a Thames-side stroll in the present.)

A different kind of mockery of literature, and of literary tastes (or appetites), animates the deftly deliberate touches of “gothick” excess in “What the Thunder Said”:

A woman drew her long black hair out tight
And fiddled whisper music on those strings
And bats with baby faces in the violet light
Whistled, and beat their wings

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And crawled head downward down a blackened wall . . .
(lines 378–82)

If the protagonist of “Portrait of a Lady” could raise an eyebrow at the lady’s decor for its “atmosphere of Juliet’s tomb,” here the poet of *The Waste Land* secures a momentary effect à la Edgar Poe. And the famous closing lines of the poem come as a sarcastic and elaborately literary (which is to say, *mock-literary*) rejoinder to the somber and reproachful Thunder Sermon glosses that precede them. The salad of polyglot quotations mocks, in the very look of its typography, Matthew Arnold’s page of “touchstones” in “The Study of Poetry,” even as the confession of fragmentation and ruin mocks that essay’s sanguine prophecy that a secular and “modern” world will increasingly turn to poetry “to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us.”¹⁰ “Why then Ile fit you,” Eliot’s text retorts; “Hieronymo’s mad againe.” (Eliot, or his poem, playing mad Hieronymo to Arnold’s “sweetness and light” is a suggestive emblem of his “anxiety of influence” in relation to one of the few among his precursors he comes close to avowing.)

In all its daunting allusiveness, then, *The Waste Land* is both a “literary” poem and a mock-literary poem, an intuition that has usually attached itself, in the history of the poem’s reception, to the “Notes” Eliot appended to it, partly (he later claimed) “with a view to spiking the guns of critics of my earlier poems who had accused me of plagiarism,” but also because the poem, for book publication, was “inconveniently short,” and required “a few more pages of printed matter” (*OPP*, p. 121) which the “Notes” would supply. Whatever the original motive for appending the “Notes,” they lend to the poem’s allusiveness (and to the other mock-pedantic features of its format, like the “critical edition”-style line-numbering in the margins), a pseudo-scholarly aura that has always seemed funny, even (or perhaps especially) to those unequipped to savor the “humour” of the poem itself—Arnold Bennett, for example, whose journal records this exchange with Eliot:

I said to him: “I want to ask you a question. It isn’t an insult. Were the notes to *The Waste Land* a lark or serious? I thought they were a skit.” He said that they were serious, and not more of a skit than some things in the poem itself. I understood him.¹¹

Perhaps the funniest thing here is Bennett’s “I understood him.” (His next sentence confesses, “I said I couldn’t see the point of the poem.”) The “Notes,” and to a degree also the erudition they annotate, align *The Waste Land* with another panoramic satire sending up the follies of a whole culture, likewise supplied with notes and editorial comment, at once an encyclopedic poem and a caricature of an encyclopedic poem,

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The Dunciad. We could do worse than see *The Waste Land* as a twentieth-century *Dunciad*.¹²

But the humor of Eliot's poem mocks more than the vanity of certain human investments in literature. It mocks more general human investments, too. As we have seen, Eliot is always alert to puncture all "versions of cheering oneself up" (SE, p. 112). Such self-regard is one that his own protagonists resist: the heroism, or antiheroism, of a Prufrock, again, is in his refusal to cheer himself up, his persistent bringing himself down. And these acts of self-deflation are characteristically ironic and even witty, animated by a humor that acts to ward off the vanities of self-regard as well as, more complicatedly, to ward off the vanities of self-contempt—as if even self-hatred were an overvaluation of the self. *The Waste Land* has several such moments; the lines quoted at the opening of this essay ("We who were living are now dying / With a little patience") are an example; so are the lines in "A Game of Chess" in which the nagging wife is "answered" not with words but with the husband's unspoken thoughts: "What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?" she demands, and he says, but only to himself, "I think we are in rats' alley / Where the dead men lost their bones," a line whose callous "humour" makes mock both of his desperate wife and of any impulse in himself to take her, or himself, or their shared misery, seriously. The Eliot protagonist can confess despair only by belittling it, and himself.

These motives converge most conflictedly in the figure of Tiresias in section III of the poem, "The Fire Sermon." Everything I have said above about the Cumæan Sybil and Madame Sosostris as (compromised) emblems of prophetic power, and thus of the sort of poetry Eliot wants to write, attaches as well to the figure of Tiresias. (Eliot's Tiresias must in subterranean ways also be a response to his mentor Pound's Tiresias, in what is now *Canto I*).¹³ But Eliot's Tiresias encodes ambitions transcending the literary, particularly Eliot's aspiration to what Lyndall Gordon has called "the saint's ambitious task."¹⁴ In fact, Eliot's Tiresias hints at something even more exalted than sainthood, which is indicated by Eliot's admonition in *After Strange Gods*, that book so concerned to repudiate most of what an earlier "T. S. Eliot" had been taken to stand for; that "It is fatally easy, under the conditions of the modern world, for a writer of genius to conceive of himself as a Messiah" (ASG, p. 33).

Tiresias is a pagan figure who suggests no hope of any deliverance such as Christ promises; yet Eliot's version of him has made this figure Christ-like in one crucial respect: his compassion. This complicates,

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even as it continues to partake of, the *schadenfreude* of pagan versions of Tiresias in Homer, Sophocles, Euripides, and Ovid, all of which are notably unsympathetic toward the heroic protagonists to whom they bring such invariably bad news. Unlike any of his pagan avatars, Eliot's Tiresias participates in the suffering he sees, like Christ; and he has "foresuffered all," like Christ; but unlike Christ, Tiresias does not weep, he laughs—or grins, or chuckles—crossing the hieratic vision of the seer with the mirthless humor of the moralizing satirist. The asperities of his diction—the "young man carbuncular," "one of the low on whom assurance sits / As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire"—evince a Tiresias evidently committed more to satire than to sainthood. Eliot's Tiresias speaks in the accents of Alexander Pope, to express a contempt no less ferocious than Pope's. His fastidious hauteur expresses *contemptus mundi*, obviously, and in particular contempt for the modern recourse to sex as a vehicle of secular salvation—the tendency Eliot later reprehended for promoting a view of sex as "the natural, 'life-giving,' cheery automatism of the modern world" (*SE*, p. 380).¹⁵

But the grin of Tiresias is also implicated in Eliot's aspiration to "the saint's ambitious task," which it qualifies, and resists, and implicitly judges as a vanity or even a blasphemy. For Tiresias' self-lacerating grin expresses an ironist's jaundiced view of the saint's project; for him, sympathy and compassion are a meaningless ordeal, undergone reluctantly, and unrelieved by any faith that there might be something redemptive in it. While Tiresias is the closest thing to a Christ-figure in the poem, the grin of Tiresias exorcises, by mocking it, the temptation "to conceive of himself as a Messiah." Tiresias is both a saint, and a caricature of a saint, and thus also a vehicle, and a caricature, of Eliot's ambitions as a soul.

In Lyndall Gordon's account of Eliot's career, the aspiration to sainthood is in conflict with the aspiration to poetry, and the literary ironist of *Prufrock*, the quatrain poems, and the *Sweeney* fragments holds the religious quester at bay until 1927, when in any case the aspiration to sainthood had become sufficiently qualified for Eliot to pursue the religious life on a far humbler footing than that of the saint.¹⁶ What I hope my account of humor in *The Waste Land* helps us see is that cutting across the tension between the secular ironist and the religious compulsive is another tension, a tension arrayed around the issue of ambition itself.¹⁷ Eliot's post-Calvinist temper severely distrusts any grand human effort or aspiration whatever, and in the frequent sarcasms of *The Waste Land* we see both the aspirations to literary power and the aspirations to "the saint's ambitious task" heavily checked by a

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grimly sarcastic humor that implicitly judges both aspirations—all such aspirations—as vain and contemptible.

I have been making reference throughout this essay to Eliot's account of "farce" in Marlowe. For Eliot, Marlowe's farce is not an incidental effect, but an essential element—and one of large importance: those who judge *The Jew of Malta* a failed tragedy, Eliot writes, would better appreciate the play's success if they considered it not as tragedy but as "farce." In thus reassessing Marlowe's achievement as "farce" rather than "tragedy," it is clear that Eliot intends not a diminution of Marlowe, but quite the reverse. (If anything, he is reproaching a literary culture that has misapprehended Marlowe's true value, and whose hierarchy of literary genres assumes that to make something great out of "farce" is a lesser accomplishment than to compose another "tragedy," however routine.) In his "Ben Jonson" essay of 1919 (the same year as the Marlowe essay), Eliot observes that "if Jonson's comedy is a comedy of humours, then Marlowe's tragedy, a large part of it, is a tragedy of humours" (*SE*, pp. 133–34).

These remarks seem to me suggestive for a reading of *The Waste Land*. Juggling Eliot's terms a bit, I would argue that to call the *The Waste Land* "a farce of humours" is to praise it very much along the lines of Eliot's praise of Marlowe. Marlowe's reduction of his "heroic" protagonists to "farce" implies a scene devoid of the dignity and grandeur of "tragedy." This is the gesture of *contemptus mundi* Eliot meant to praise in Marlowe, and for Eliot's own achievement of which, in *The Waste Land*, Marlowe was evidently a helpful exemplar, if not exactly a model. Something like Marlowe's "farce" was just what Eliot was looking for: a mode appropriate to the representation of what Eliot famously called, in his 1923 review of *Ulysses*, "the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history."¹⁸

The Waste Land, too, is a poem that will be misapprehended if its elements of farce are not recognized. It, too, depicts a world in which the possibility of "tragedy" has devolved into "farce": is seen and experienced as farce, indeed, by its own inhabitants—is even, to an uncertain degree, constituted as farce, rendered farcical, by the self-defeating "humours," the self-contempt, the demoralized mockery, the defeatism, the paralysis, the *aboulie*, of these grimly (and compulsively) joking voices for whom the Blakean proverb, that we become what we behold, has proven an ironic judgment on a vision we must behold, even if we might rather not. Eliot's voices insist, with that "peculiar honesty," that tenacious "unpleasantness" Eliot commended in Blake, on beholding their vision, and in doing so, they share with

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Pruferock something of the ambiguous heroism, or antiheroism, of facing the worst, even at the expense of any possible best that may be in them.

Pruferock is, in something like *The Waste Land* manner, the humorist of his own despair, wryly mocking his own anxieties. But Prufrock, notwithstanding his "No! I am not Prince Hamlet," is Hamlet-like in that his humor seems a sort of solace, however ambiguous, to himself, as well as a means of appeal to the reader. Nine years after writing *Pruferock*, and two before writing *The Waste Land*, Eliot went on record with a stern judgment of "Hamlet and His Problems" (1919), dismissing Hamlet's "levity" as only "a form of emotional relief," making it seem an evasion (a "*bovarysme*"), and thus a failure at once moral, intellectual, and (for Hamlet's author) artistic. ("In the character Hamlet it is the buffoonery of an emotion that can find no outlet in action; in the dramatist it is the buffoonery of an emotion he cannot express in art" [SE, pp. 125–26].) I have argued elsewhere that this judgment of 1919 implies a repudiation of "Pruferock," which was (in 1919) Eliot's largest and best-known poem;¹⁹ be that as it may, "the buffoonery of an emotion that can find no outlet in action" seems quite exactly the formula for the predicaments of futility pictured in *The Waste Land*.

Which raises the question, What, if anything, exempts Eliot's poem from the indictment he levels against *Hamlet*? Some time after writing *The Waste Land*, Eliot reportedly dismissed it in much the same belittling terms ("relief") that he used in dismissing *Hamlet*: "To me [*The Waste Land*] was only the relief of a personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life; it is just a piece of rhythmical grumbling."²⁰ In short, to Eliot's maturer view, *nothing* protects *The Waste Land* from the indictment "Hamlet and His Problems" levels against *Hamlet* and, implicitly, against "Pruferock." But at the time of its composition, at least, *The Waste Land* apparently seemed to Eliot to satisfy the scruples he raised against it later. Why? The answer can only be that the indictment of "relief" and of the quest for "relief" is implicit in the poem. The "humour" audible in the poem's voices is not a Hamlet-like effort toward "emotional relief"; in it these voices both confess and judge their condition—the condition of desperate, self-conscious, demoralized modernity in which "humour" must be its own relief, even if only a caricature of relief, which is to say, no relief at all. There must be no "relief" because "relief" would equal "cheering oneself up"; hence the "humour" of the poem (and its author)—a humor necessarily not cheery but grim, a "humour" that degrades tragedy to farce. It is the "no relief" condition that allows *The Waste Land's* "humour" to evade

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the strictures Eliot levels against *Hamlet*: the world of suffering (where "the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief" [line 23]) the poem appears to protest is the condition of its being written at all. Eliot's later dismissal of the poem once taken as the acme of "impersonality"—"only the relief of [Eliot's own] personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life"—reinstates the indictment of "relief," lodging it not against the poem's voices but against its author, Eliot himself, who now turns out (farcically?) to have written a poem acclaimed as the exemplary expression of a generation's despair simply as a means of "cheering himself up."

If Marlowe's art, as Eliot concludes, "attains its effects by something not unlike caricature" (*SE*, p. 106), the remark seems a formula for the ambivalent humor of *The Waste Land*. I have said that Tiresias is a saint and also a caricature of a saint, and thus both a vehicle and a caricature of Eliot's ambitions, both as poet and as soul. Likewise the poem: if *The Waste Land* is an ambitious poem, it is also, with its mock-pedantic apparatus of notes and allusions, a caricature of an ambitious poem. And this, most disconcertingly, in a way to judge severely the ambitions not only of the poet, but also the ambitions of his readers—as in that most Tiresian line of Baudelaire, quoted in *The Waste Land*: "hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable—mon frère!"

¹ References to Eliot's writings are cited parenthetically in the text with the following abbreviations:

ASG: *After Strange Gods* (London: Faber, 1934).

CPP: *Complete Poems and Plays* (New York: Harcourt, 1952).

OPP: *On Poetry and Poets* (New York: Noonday Press, 1961).

SE: *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, 1960).

² For a suggestive reading of the poem in relation to the psychological turmoils that produced it, see Wayne Koestenbaum, "The *Waste Land*: T. S. Eliot's and Ezra Pound's Collaboration on Hysteria," *Twentieth Century Literature*, 34 (1988), 113–39.

³ Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Milton" (1825), *Literary and Historical Essays Contributed to the Edinburgh Review* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1923), p. 4.

⁴ Michael Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984), p. 172.

⁵ Gregory S. Jay offers a suggestive discussion of popular-culture elements in *The Waste Land*, and observes that they were much more prominent in the manuscript than in the trimmed-down draft finally cleared for publication by Pound (*T. S. Eliot and the Poetics of Literary History* [Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1983], p. 139).

⁶ The most penetrating discussion of this aspect of Eliot's achievement to

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date is Louis Menand, *Discovering Modernism: T. S. Eliot and His Context* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987). As a document more contemporary with the poem itself, I. A. Richards' *Science and Poetry* (New York: Norton, 1926) is of particular interest, both in offering a diagnosis in just these terms of "the general situation" for poetry in that time, and in being so largely, and so self-evidently, an essay prompted by Eliot's work in general, and *The Waste Land* in particular. See esp. chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 9–36), and chapters 5 and 6 (pp. 53–79).

⁷ On this theme, see Lionel Trilling, "Freud: Within and Beyond Culture," in *Beyond Culture* (New York: Viking Press/Compass, 1968), pp. 89–118; and *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1972), esp. the last chapter, "The Authentic Unconscious" (pp. 134–72).

⁸ Cf. "The Dry Salvages," V, lines 184–98 (CPP, p. 135–36):

To communicate with Mars, converse with spirits,
To report the behavior of the sea monster,
Describe the horoscope, haruspicate or scry,
Observe disease in signatures, evoke
Biography from the wrinkles of the palm
And tragedy from fingers; release omens
By sortilege, or tea leaves, riddle the inevitable
With playing cards, fiddle with pentagrams
Or barbituric acids, or dissect
The recurrent image into pre-conscious terrors—
To explore the womb, or tomb, or dreams, all these are usual
Pastimes and drugs, and features of the press:
And always will be, some of them especially
When there is distress of nations and perplexity
Whether on the shores of Asia, or in the Edgware Road.

⁹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VI, lines 555–62:

ille indignantem et nomen patris usque vocantem
luctantemque loqui comprehensam forcipe linguam
abstulit ense fero. radix micat ultima linguae,
ipsa jacet terraeque tremens inmurmurat atrae,
utque salire solet mutilatae cauda colubrae
palpitat et moriens dominae vestigia quaerit.
hoc quoque post facinus (vix ausim credere) fertur
saepe sua lacerum repetisse libidine corpus.

I am quoting from the Loeb edition of Frank Justus Miller; the Loeb translations seem, by policy, designed to sweeten, wherever possible, any indecorousness in the originals, but Ovid's leeringly and titillatingly sophisticated violence is too extreme to be muffled in Miller's translation:

But he seized her tongue with pincers, as it protested against the outrage, calling ever on the name of her father and struggling to speak, and cut it off with his merciless blade. The mangled root quivers, while the severed tongue lies palpitating on the dark earth, faintly murmuring; and, as the severed tail of a mangled snake is wont to writhe, it twitches convulsively, and with its last dying movement it seeks its mistress's feet. Even after this horrid deed—one would scarce believe it—the monarch is said to have

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worked his lustful will again and again upon the poor mangled form. (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ed. and trans. Frank Justus Miller, 2 vols. [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1951], I, 327)

¹⁰ Matthew Arnold, "The Study of Poetry" (1880), *The Poetry and Criticism of Matthew Arnold*, ed. Dwight Culler (Boston: Houghton, 1961), p. 306.

¹¹ Entry for Wednesday, 10 Sept. 1924, *The Journal of Arnold Bennett* (Garden City, N.Y.: Garden City Publishing Co., n.d.), p. 786.

¹² See J. S. Cunningham, "Pope, Eliot, and the Mind of Europe," *The Waste Land in Different Voices*, ed. A. D. Moody (London: Edward Arnold, 1974), pp. 67–86. See also Patricia Meyer Spacks, *An Argument of Images* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 84–132; Maynard Mack, *Alexander Pope: A Life* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1985), p. 782; and Claude Rawson, "Pope's Waste Land: Reflections on Mock-Heroic," in *Order from Confusion Sprung: Studies in Eighteenth-Century Literature from Swift to Cowper* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1985), pp. 201–21. My thinking is most indebted here, in ways too complex for summary, to Hugh Kenner, *The Counterfeitors* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1968).

¹³ At the time Eliot was writing *The Waste Land*, Pound's translation of the Tiresias passages of the *Odyssey*, now in *Canto I*, came at the close of (then) *Canto III*—what is now called *ur-Canto III*; see Ronald Bush, *The Genesis of Ezra Pound's Cantos* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1976).

¹⁴ Lyndall Gordon, *Eliot's Early Years* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 1, 60; see also pp. 59–64, 120–40.

¹⁵ *The Waste Land* was written at the height of the post-Great War discovery of Freud, but also in the background is everything represented by, and made out of, Ibsen, Wilde, Havelock Ellis, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, Edward Carpenter, J. Addington Symonds, and others in generations preceding Eliot's; more contemporary with Eliot himself were Bertrand Russell, D. H. Lawrence, J. Middleton Murry, the Bloomsbury milieu generally, with its revision of G. E. Moore to a proponent of Free Love, as well as, more troublingly for Eliot, the sexual liberationism of men he admired, like Pound and Joyce. To all of this *The Waste Land* sounds a dissenting note. When I. A. Richards commended Eliot's "persistent concern with sex, the problem of our generation, as religion was the problem of the last," Eliot eventually reproached him for speaking as if religion and sex were merely historical "problems"; nevertheless he did not deny his "persistent concern with sex" (I. A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism* [1925; rpt. New York: Harcourt, n.d.], p. 292; Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* [1933; 2nd ed. London: Faber, 1964], pp. 126–27).

Incidentally, Lyndall Gordon, studying Eliot's manuscript notes for *Murder in the Cathedral*, argues that three of those named above, Russell, Wells, and Lawrence, were models for that play's first "Tempters" (*Eliot's New Life* [New York: Farrar, 1988], pp. 30–31).

¹⁶ Cleo McNelly Kearns makes the same point, but in the vocabulary of Eastern religion, that Eliot's conversion was "based on his recognition of himself as a Devotee rather than a Sage" (*T. S. Eliot and Indic Traditions: A Study in Poetry and Belief* [New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987], p. 46).

¹⁷ For more on the paradox of Eliot's brilliant and willful success as a poet of failure and futility, and its consequences for the eventual shape of his career,

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see my essay, "The Success and Failure of T. S. Eliot," *Sewanee Review*, 96 (1988), 55-76.

¹⁸ T. S. Eliot, "Ulysses, Order, and Myth," *Dial*, 75 (1923), 480-83; rpt. in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt/Farrar, 1975), p. 177.

¹⁹ See Steven Helmling, "The Humor of Eliot: From 'Prufrock' to *The Waste Land*," *Yeats/Eliot Review*, 9 (1988), 153-56.

²⁰ Unfortunately this remark is undated, reported with no indications of the circumstances in which Eliot said it, and not quoted directly from Eliot himself, but transmitted to us at two removes: it was reported in a lecture by Theodore Spencer, and recorded by Eliot's brother (see *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*, ed. Valerie Eliot [New York: Harcourt, 1971], p. 1). But even if the reported words might not be exactly the ones Eliot used, it seems safe to trust the general drift of the remark.

“A Rose to the End of Time”: William Carlos Williams and Marriage

ANN W. FISHER-WIRTH

In an early imagist poem, “Marriage,” much of William Carlos Williams’ conception of his relationship with his wife, Florence Herman Williams,¹ can be seen:

So different, this man
And this woman:
A stream flowing
In a field.²

Short and unobtrusive, the poem is nevertheless remarkably rich—and remarkably ambiguous. One reading it suggests would emphasize the great beauty and rarity of this marriage. Like a haiku, the poem presents the moment in which it occurs—and hence the relationship which it defines—as self-sufficient and complete; time and being merge to reveal “this . . . this” (the word is repeated twice) in its eternal presence. The only verb is a gerund, “flowing,” the verb form combining process and duration; this stream is constantly changing and in motion, yet constantly the same. For all the fluidity of the image, the poem therefore possesses a great permanence, a great stillness.

Like the stream flowing “in” (not “through”) the field, this marriage just *is*, once and for all. The sense of permanence is reinforced, too, by the fact that stream and field seem coterminous. The stream which flows “in” but not “through” comes from and issues into nowhere, or rather comes from and issues into nothing but its mutuality with the field, a mutuality underlined by the image’s suggestion of sexual rapture. Consummation is endless; the male flows “in” (not “into”) the female not with the spasm which signifies limitation, but with an endless, easy *jouissance*. For many reasons, then, “this man / And this

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woman" can be said to be "So different," so unusual. Unlike many, they are capable of a relationship that is not a matter of will, constraint, contract, innocence, guilt, qualification, limitation, or failure, but which has all the simplicity, all the ineluctability—and finally, all the ineffability—of nature. There is nothing that needs to be done about this marriage; like a stream or a field, the only way to take it is for granted.

The facts of Williams' marriage to Flossie are well known, and complicate such a blissful reading of "Marriage." He married her after a long and wearing engagement on December 12, 1912, having proposed to her only three days after her older sister Charlotte, a beautiful concert pianist with whom both Williams and his brother Ed thought themselves in love, accepted Ed and turned Williams down. In the autobiographical novel *The Build-up*, Williams writes of Charlotte's rejection of him: "Something had come to an end. It was a deeper wound than he should ever thereafter in his life be able to sound. It was bottomless."³ Flossie knew what rejection felt like, for she was in love with Williams. She came now to seem like "love itself . . . rejected, as he himself now had been rejected"; therefore, Williams hoped, they could together realize "a sort of love, not romantic love, but a love that with daring can be made difficultly to blossom. It is founded on passion, a dark sort of passion, but it is founded on passion, a passion of despair, as all life is despair" (*B*, p. 262). The marriage survived these painful beginnings, the birth of two sons, the nearly twenty-five years' presence of Williams' bedridden mother, Williams' hectic medical practice, his engrossment with his writing, his repeated infidelities, and at last his failing health, to end only with his death on March 4, 1963.⁴ Flossie, whom Williams describes as hard as nails and useful as a spade, was indeed "the rock on which I have built"⁵—and a rock with a great deal to weather.

At bottom, however, the sense of permanence and givenness of which "Marriage" speaks was always there. Near the end of his life, Williams echoes the image of stream and field in "Marriage," when he gives the working title "The River of Heaven" to the beautiful tribute to Flossie which he would come to call "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower."⁶ Over the years, the stream has swelled to become a river, and in a season of desolation the field of the "dear ordinary"⁷ has become "heaven"—a term Williams uses to signify neither another world nor a state of religious redemption, but a life perceived as plenitude and fulfillment, in those moments in which one knows oneself, despite one's griefs and losses, "secure, / by grace of the imagination, / safe in its

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care.”⁸ In the Coda of “Asphodel,” Williams arrives at the deepest implications of his forty-five years’ image of stream and field, when he writes of his life as centered in, discoverable through, and irradiated by the memory of his bride. “As I think of it now,” he writes,

after a lifetime,
it is as if
a sweet-scented flower
were poised
and for me did open

(PB, p. 182)

The poem becomes the field of this opening flower, and “love, abiding love,” sustained through its betrayal and reawakened now through memory in the imminence of death, becomes the river of heaven, flowing ceaselessly and freely in the light (*PB*, p. 153).

Surveying Williams’ poetic career, one finds that marriage is his deepest and central metaphor, the wellspring of his art and of his life. In Williams’ myth of his own life, there is nothing outside the condition of marriage—both in the rather ordinary sense that he cannot conceive of living unmarried and in the more frightening, more unusual sense that, without marriage, he feels, there would be only a void. “I died when I walked upon the grass,” Williams’ persona Doc Thurber tells his wife Myra in the confessional play *A Dream of Love*. “I died in everything. I died when I was born. . . . From which you once rescued me—hence my devotion.”⁹ The sentiment seems extreme unless one realizes that for Williams, marriage, like the adultery that troubled his own marriage, is powerfully symbolic. Whereas adultery is a statement of freedom, an assertion of desire independent of social order, and therefore an assertion of art, marriage is a statement of presence in the world, a promise of commitment to the world, without which commitment there would be no art and no one to be free.¹⁰ Marriage creates identity because it creates what Williams calls “the first wife,”¹¹ the initial and essential acknowledgment of the Other. As Williams writes in *Paterson*:

[T]he snow falling into the water,
part upon the rock, part in the dry weeds
and part into the water where it
vanishes—its form no longer what it was:

the bird alighting, that pushes
its feet forward to take up the impetus
and falls forward nevertheless
among the twigs. The weak-necked daisy

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bending to the wind . . .
 (P, pp. 33–34)

These things are reflected in marriage; they are signs of “the first wife,” and like the wife, they are the Other. To be wed to her is to be wed to them, to enter into the dance revealed by all existence.¹² It is, furthermore, to become a poet, aware of the way “events” dance “two / and two with language which they / forever surpass . . .” (P, p. 34). For she, “the first beauty, complex, ovate,” is the “flower within a flower” among the rocks, the “den in the / rocks, bole and fangs,” the wild and terrifying site of the poet’s first embrace of Beautiful Thing (P, p. 33). Whatever the wife may think, adultery pays her homage; it is the testament of desire, the “violent refreshing”¹³ that keeps the love first found in her and because of her alive.

The cave with its “stinking breath” where the “flower within the flower” may be found; the apple-blossomed slopes of Paterson’s mythic consort, Garrett Mountain; the abiding and flowering field: Williams’ presentation of both wife and Beautiful Thing¹⁴ works by an intimate sexual geography which, though it often issues in beautiful poetry, must be a source of ambivalence for his female reader. In many respects, few male writers write better about women than Williams. His knowledge of and appreciation for women are extraordinary, as is his ability to ignore conventional standards of female beauty. Like Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One’s Own*, he is haunted by the invisibility, under dominant social systems, of many women’s lives. “All these infinitely obscure lives remain to be recorded,”¹⁵ she writes of ordinary women—and with Elena, Grandma Wellcome, Elsie, Cress, Helen, and Margaret of “The Farmers’ Daughters,” the girl with the pimply face, the war-shattered mother in “A Face of Stone,” the woman giving birth in “A Night in June,” unquenchable Jean Beicke, baby Flossie in *White Mule*—with these and many others, Williams records and celebrates hitherto obscured female lives.

When he writes about infancy, childhood, childbirth, poverty, domesticity, old age, and friendship, he retrieves whole realms of experience from silence. Still, as Joan Nay points out in her essay “William Carlos Williams and the Singular Woman,” an “abstract quality . . . becomes apparent when viewing Williams’s total work. A careful reading yields the realization that however individualized the women seem, essentially they are depicted as being the same underneath. . . . Au fond, the females are the same woman.”¹⁶

To a great extent, Williams is a poet capable of surrendering to heterogeneity and multiplicity, yielding up the sense of monolithic

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identity to experience the self as dance, flow, incessant construction and deconstruction, "damnation,"¹⁷ perpetual change. To a great extent, that is to say, his sense of his own identity is feminine: in his emphasis on touch or contact over sight, his open-endedness, his marginality, his erotic polymorphousness and imaginative fluidity, he embodies important aspects of what French feminist theorists call "*le fémininité*." "It is the woman in us / That makes us write," he comments in an early poem, "Transitional" (*CP*, p. 40); in a letter to Denise Levertov written many years later, he adds that no poet who was "not in essence a woman as well as a man" could "amount to anything as a poet."¹⁸

Williams possesses as well what Rachel Blau DuPlessis calls a "'female' aesthetic": one shared by anyone, man or woman, who creates "artworks that incorporate contradiction and nonlinear movement into the heart of the text" and that "wish to criticize, to differentiate from, to overturn the dominant forms of knowing and understanding with which they are saturated."¹⁹ However, when Williams considers women, he relies on precisely the essentialist thinking and binary oppositions which, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray argue, are at the heart of phallogocentric discourse and consequently at the heart of women's invisibility and silence. It seems in fact that the greater the degree to which the woman of whom Williams writes is sexually available, the greater the degree to which *she* fades from Williams' writing.²⁰ The "phenomenological position"²¹ which Blau DuPlessis sees as linking Williams with contemporary feminist writers gives way to mythification and abstraction, and though sometimes the results are very beautiful—as in the "Beautiful Thing" passages of *Paterson III* or the "virgin/whore" passages of *Paterson V*—the individual woman who occasions the poem tends to become little more than the allure of her parts. She becomes the site of desire, a sexual status or sexual situation: the virgin/whore, the cave, the Beautiful Thing.²²

Discussing the thought of Hélène Cixous, Toril Moi writes: "For Cixous, who at this point is heavily indebted to Jacques Derrida's work, Western philosophy and literary thought are and have always been caught up in [an] endless series of hierarchical binary oppositions that always in the end come back to the fundamental 'couple' of male/female."²³ Each opposition deriving from this fundamental couple—"Activity/Passivity, Sun/Moon, Culture/Nature, Day/Night, Father/Mother," and so on—"can be analyzed as a hierarchy where the 'feminine' side is always seen as the negative, powerless instance."²⁴ Williams' poem "Marriage," with which my essay begins, is only partly an exception. If experienced as a gestalt, the image of the stream

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flowing in the field seems to be one of harmony and interdependency, as does the reference to "this man" and "this woman" as "So different." If, however, one looks closely at the component parts of the image, a very different configuration appears. "Marriage" exemplifies Williams' lifelong theories about the nature of the sexes. The man and woman, who may indeed be different from other couples, are also "So different" from each other, and the differences breed inevitable trouble.

While still in medical school, Williams was greatly impressed by Otto Weininger's *Sex and Character*, published in 1906. This work, which perpetrates misogynist binary thinking with a vengeance,²⁵ claims among other things that "There are no men in whom there is no trace of the transcendent . . . and there is no woman of whom that could truly be said. However degraded a man may be, he is immeasurably above the most superior woman. . . ."²⁶ To Weininger, man is spirit and woman is matter. Woman exists solely for and in her sexual function; she is only either mother or whore. Whereas man is capable of thought and even of genius (which Weininger defines as the ability imaginatively to incorporate all possible forms of experience within oneself),²⁷ woman is capable only of "henids"—undifferentiated "somethings" which Weininger cannot describe but which, he argues, characterize the mental life of infants.²⁸ "Women," Weininger claims,

have no existence and no essence; they are not, they are nothing. . . . Woman has no share in ontological reality, no relation to the thing-in-itself, which, in the deepest interpretation, is the absolute, is God. . . . Woman has no relation to the idea, she neither affirms nor denies it; she is neither moral nor anti-moral; mathematically speaking, she has no sign. . . . She is as non-moral as she is non-logical. But all existence is moral and logical existence. So woman has no existence.²⁹

Truly, as Cixous argues, this kind of thought spells death.³⁰ In the ultimate binary opposition, woman does not even get to take part in binary opposition, by which, according to Weininger, all that exists may be defined.

In Williams' opinion, expressed in "The Great Sex Spiral" (a long letter to the *Egoist* responding to Dora Marsden's essays on "Lingual Psychology"), Weininger's great service "is that he recognizes the psychologic field to be divided into reciprocal halves, the cleavage running roughly with the division of sex."³¹ Williams' thinking on the subject is far less extreme than Weininger's, but though he reverses some of Weininger's conclusions, the effects are in some ways much the

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same. He agrees with Weininger regarding transcendence: "Man philosophically or psychologically denies the earth, woman proclaims it."

He differs, however, regarding the value of transcendence. Aside from his "simple sex function," man, according to Williams, "is wholly unnecessary to objective life. . . ." Unattached to the earth, he cannot find "objective satisfaction"; his fate lies in pursuit, either of the female or away from the earth, "to further hunting, to star-gazing, to idleness." For woman, in contrast, "the reality of fact" is firmly, biologically established. Precisely because woman has this advantage, Weininger attempts to counter man's sense of his own futility by granting him a soul; but, according to Williams, "in his eagerness to make out a case for man [Weininger] deliberately perverts and transposes facts. Man is the vague generalizer, woman the concrete thinker, and not the reverse as he imagined."³²

If, as Paul Mariani claims, Williams hereby concludes that woman with her "genetic grasp of reality"³³ is superior to man, it is not a superiority a woman need wholeheartedly desire. It grants woman contact but it grants man speech; his is the genial flow that penetrates her field and gives voice to what is found there.³⁴ She is earth, she flowers, but aside from what her body manifests, she makes no sign. He is flow, she is containment; he livens her, she bounds him. In much of his life, it is true, Williams seems to have tempered this sense of sexual polarities with an awareness of the bisexuality of both male and female psyches; he can find "the woman" in himself—the Kora, the anima, the "ground of his desire"³⁵—and he can appreciate the forceful expressiveness, the animus energy, of various actual women, both artists and not. Yet it strikes me that, in writing about his marriage to Flossie, he preserves the polarities in a fairly pure state. Marriage, like a poem, is an "open field composition."³⁶ He is the composer, "happy genius of my household."³⁷ She is the open field. He flows, he plays and dances. She abides.

The disadvantages to a woman of such a polarization are, of course, enormous. Not only is she imagined as speechless and inert, capable neither of presenting her own experience in her own voice nor of picking herself up and existing elsewhere; naturally enough, given this image of her, she also soon comes to seem boring. Boredom is present, for instance (though latent), in "Marriage," as one sees if one emphasizes the line break: "So different, this man / And this woman." One can almost hear the sigh. He is extraordinary. She, alas, is not. "I was getting bored," says Doc in *A Dream of Love*, when Myra asks him

why he entered an affair with his typist, Dotty Randall. "I knew that if we were to keep on loving each other something had to be done about it. This opportunity offered itself and I took it." When Myra asks him, "Suppose you had found me in such a position," he replies with perfect seriousness, "You couldn't be in such a position. You've got *me!*" (*DL*, pp. 208–09). He is right, too. His dissatisfaction and infidelity, her dissatisfaction and anguished fidelity, are practically foregone conclusions, given the way they both imagine their marriage. "I get angry at you," Myra tells Doc. "I feel lonely, neglected. But I don't blame you. Ever. I love you. And that's my life" (*DL*, p. 126).

In *Remembrance of Things Past*, Proust insists that each thing has its color and its flame. In general, Williams agrees. His world is full of vibrancy and heat, full in particular of the vivid beauty of female self-presentation: he writes of schoolgirls who walk the hot streets "touching their avid mouths / with pink sugar on a stick"; of a Black woman carrying marigolds who seems an "ambassador / from another world," holding her orange and yellow flowers "upright / as a torch / so early in the morning"; or of Beautiful Thing, who lies on her filthy bed in the wealthy white woman's basement, gang-raped by the guys from Paterson and Newark, making him think of "Persephone gone to hell, that hell could not keep with / the advancing season of pity," "a flame, / black plush, a dark flame" (*CP*, p. 174; *PB*, p. 123; *P*, pp. 151, 154). Flossie, too, has her color. "Will it never be possible / to separate you from your greyness?" Williams bitterly demands in a poem from *Al Que Quiere!*:

Must you always be sinking backward
into your grey-brown landscapes—and trees
always in the distance, always against
a grey sky?

Must I be always
moving counter to you? Is there no place
where we can be at peace together
and the motion of our drawing apart
be altogether taken up?

I see myself
standing upon your shoulders touching
a grey, broken sky—
but you, weighted down with me,
yet gripping my ankles,—move
laboriously on,
where it is level and undisturbed by colors
(“A Portrait in Greys,” *CP*, p. 99)

In conversation with John C. Thirlwall, Williams indicated that this was written about Flossie.³⁸ For all its blame, though, the poem is astonishingly perceptive about the part the poet plays in his wife's depression. He realizes clearly enough not just that her support buoys him up, but that, tragically, he can only keep going by walking on her, only stay up by keeping her down. They are caught in a cruel trap: he scorns her dullness and self-effacement, despises himself for debasing her, hints that if she were different he would walk on her no longer, yet knows too that in some grim sense he depends upon keeping her gray.

In her grayness lies his safety. "Why not just kill yourself," Williams writes a few years later in *A Voyage to Pagany*, a novel based on Williams' trip to Europe with Flossie in 1924, but a novel from which Flossie and the order and stability she represents have been excised.³⁹ His autobiographical hero, Evans Dionysus Evans, longs to "go loose," but knows that "if he should go loose, he would die, of this he was convinced, since to go loose to him was to go totally ungoverned, drunken, syphilitic, starved, jailed, murderous: Finis. . . . This had been his excuse. Not an excuse. It was the wall over which he could not climb, short of annihilation" (VP, p. 49). In *Kora in Hell*, the brilliant, far more Dionysian book of improvisations Williams wrote just after *Al Que Quiere!*, he comes as close as he ever does to capturing in language the revelations of such abandon:

Nothing is any pleasure but misery and brokenness. THIS is the only up-cadence. This is where the secret rolls over and opens its eyes. Bitter words spoken to a child ripple in morning light! Boredom from a bedroom door thrills with anticipation! The complaints of an old man dying piecemeal are startling chirrups. Coughs go singing on springtime paths across a field; corruption picks strawberries and slow warping of the mind, blacking the deadly walls—counted and recounted—rolls in the grass and shouts ecstatically. All is solved! The moaning and dull sobbing of infants sets blood tingling and eyes ablaze to listen. Speed sings in the heels at long nights tossing on coarse sheets with burning sockets staring into the black. Dance! Sing! Coil and uncoil! Whip yourselves about! Shout the deliverance! . . . Here is dancing! The mind in tatters. (K, p. 57)

In this passage, Williams powerfully evokes the ecstasy of corruption. He is entranced by the appalling human suffering of dying babies, unloved children, rotting bodies, unrequited love, for in mind-shattering pain lies final knowledge. But, crazy and vindictive as she was (having been spurned in her offer to give Williams syphilis for the sake of his visionary madness), the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven

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was also partly right when she accused him of backing off from the delights of such abandon, of flirting with chaos and using home as a retreat. At this point in Williams' life, he was indeed, in her memorable phrase, a "Hamlet of Wedding-Ring."⁴⁰ No wonder, given the intensity of his perceptions and desires, and what seems to have been the perilous fluidity of his ego boundaries. As Denise Levertov points out, Williams knew more about the darkness than is sometimes imagined; his poetry is driven by the savage force the Spanish call the *duende*—the force that takes over only *after* the flamenco singer's voice and control are shattered.⁴¹ "And so the music . . . takes the lead. *Ay de mí, Juana la Loca, reina de España, esa estás tú canta, reina mía!*" (K, p. 57). The problem lies in what this made of Flossie. Hard as nails, useful as a spade, sturdy as a rock: for him to survive at all, she had to be gray.

Like all descriptions of relationships, this one is overly simple. It is true that, later in Williams' career, he found ways of rediscovering Flossie. In the Stecher novels, for instance (which were begun, significantly, during a yearlong separation in which Flossie and their sons lived in Europe),⁴² Williams creates Flossie from the beginning—she is born on page one of *White Mule* and they marry at the end of *The Build-up*—and it is as if, having given birth to her in his imagination, he can know her for the first time. He does what Doc says a man must do, in *A Dream of Love*: "just as a woman must produce out of her female belly to complete herself—a son—so a man must produce a woman, in full beauty out of the shell of his imagination and possess her, to complete himself also. . . ." Myra sardonically calls this "The rape of the imagination" (DL, p. 200), and of course she has a point: giving birth to Flossie, giving voice to Flossie, Williams does in a sense appropriate and use her. But the effects of this appropriation are utterly different from the effects of Doc's use of Myra. If Flossie is Williams' Galatea, she is also, for a change, his Venus. Especially as a baby and very young child, in the first two novels of the trilogy, she seems born not only out of the shell of his imagination, but also out of life, *her* life. She is colorful and feisty, full of her own experience, her own wonder, and his language—intimate and fresh, matter-of-fact and tough yet filled with awe—lies down before her.

A beautiful story, "To Fall Asleep," realizes Flossie with equal success in a different way. In the Stecher novels, Williams is both narrator and, as Charlie Bishop, eventually a character. As narrator, he focuses largely on Flossie (and on her father, Joe, the novels' hero), though in his guise as Charlie Bishop he is smitten with Flossie's sister Charlotte,⁴³ and Flossie fades into the background once she reaches

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sexual maturity, though she remains the nominal heroine of even the third book. In "To Fall Asleep," Williams divides himself poignantly in two: he is Fritz, a doctor and philandering husband who leaves home on a night call and stays out for hours, until the very end of the story, and he is Bill, the old friend and houseguest to whose bedroom Fritz's wife Sally comes in her longing for companionship and sleep. As Fritz, he articulates Williams' oft-repeated question about marriage: "How can a man bring love home if he doesn't go out and find it—like a rabbit."⁴⁴ As Fritz, he has caused his wife great pain. His history resembles Williams'. "I've never been really happy with him, Bill," Sally says. "There are some things I really can't forgive. He played me some dirty tricks when I was first married and most trusted him. I wanted to die" (FD, p. 182).

As Bill, though, he not only listens to her lovingly but also violently desires her; at one point she makes him tremble so badly that he shakes and rattles an enormous overstuffed chair. Fritz seems to be Williams as he felt he too often was; Bill is what he would be, if only he could apprehend his wife as truly Other. If he could only unmarry her, get her at a little distance, then he could desire to close the gap.⁴⁵ Bill has been to Russia—in an effort to keep his hands off Sally, he tells her about his trip and discusses socialized medicine. Metaphorically, he has been to Russia, too. As Williams says of himself in "A Morning Imagination of Russia," which presents the local soviet as a symbol for the world cherished and therefore redeemed by the imagination, Bill has "paid heavily"—he has no wife, no family, no home—but he has "gotten—touch" (CP, p. 306). Cherishing Sally, he earns her trust, and she surrenders to his compassion, revealing herself to him, falling asleep in his bed. In the story, he is the one who knows her, not her husband.

"To Fall Asleep" and "Hands Across the Sea"—in which Williams creates Flossie as "Mrs. Andrews" during the yearlong separation, and writes of her friendship with an attractive Scots doctor, McFarland—are Williams' fullest fictional treatments of the wife as adult and desirable. In each case, he perceives her desirability as the result of a process of triangulation whereby he creates a desirous double for himself: he is not just Fritz but also Bill, not just Dr. Andrews but also Dr. McFarland. In "Asphodel," Williams writes,

All women are not Helen,
I know that,
but have Helen in their hearts.

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My sweet,
you have it also, therefore
I love you
and could not love you otherwise
(*PB*, p. 159)

Though in the poem he immediately changes the subject, to imagine “a field made up of women / all silver-white,” and to ask the perennial question, “What should you do / but love them?” (*PB*, p. 160), in these stories he sees the Helen in his wife’s heart. Doubling himself with regard to her, imagining himself as both husband and quasi-lover, he arouses himself with the thought of her possible adultery—that is to say, in this scheme of things, the thought of her autonomy—and thereby discovers her interest. “Marriages tend to become incest,” Williams wrote in an unpublished journal during his separation from Flossie. “A wife is nine-tenths a sister or a mother—without adulteries on both parts.”⁴⁶ As Williams writes of it, of course, adultery on the wife’s part goes no further than his own imagination. He reassures himself by representing her as illicitly desirable but not really illicitly desiring: Sally wants Fritz, not Bill; Mrs. Andrews enjoys Dr. McFarland’s attention but is passionately attached to Dr. Andrews. Williams uses the double primarily to express his own ambivalence toward marriage: outside, the man wants inside, he wants to get away. Nevertheless, he also genuinely begins to recognize the wife’s sufficiency and mystery as Other in this tentative fantasy of danger, in which he imagines a man who resembles him in every way but marriage listening to and desiring a fictive Flossie.

Even in the early poetry itself, Williams occasionally fuses marriage and desire. In “Williams, Sappho, and the Woman-as-Other,” Stephen Tapscott points out that there is “very little eroticism in the poems” about Flossie until *Paterson V* and *Pictures from Brueghel* (and that the eroticism in these late poems is retrospective).⁴⁷ He is largely right, and the absence is emphasized by the fact that so many of the poems *not* about Flossie—poems about nature, children, other women, his own body—vibrate with sex.⁴⁸ There are important exceptions, however, among them “Love Song (I lie here thinking of you)” and “Queen-Anne’s-Lace,” the latter particularly striking for the ways in which it exemplifies the redemptive, transformative power of the woman’s surrender to desire:

Her body is not so white as
anemone petals nor so smooth—nor
so remote a thing. It is a field
of the wild carrot taking

the field by force; the grass
does not raise above it.

Here is no question of whiteness,
white as can be, with a purple mole
at the center of each flower.
Each flower is a hand's span
of her whiteness. Wherever
his hand has lain there is
a tiny purple blemish. Each part
is a blossom under his touch
to which the fibers of her being
stem one by one, each to its end,
until the whole field is a
white desire, empty, a single stem,
a cluster, flower by flower,
a pious wish to whiteness gone over—
or nothing

(CP, p. 162)

"Flossie again," Williams commented of "Queen-Anne's Lace" to John C. Thirlwall.⁴⁹ There is no need here to think of other women, "each," as Williams writes in *Paterson*, "like a flower" (P, p. 15). Nor is there need to say, "In one woman I find all the rest"—which, given the facts, seems at best equivocation. Flossie is not gray here, but white, not relatively absent, but blindingly, absolutely present, so complete in her response that its component elements, its colors, can no longer be differentiated or separated out. Hers is not the whiteness of conventional purity or conventional beauty; she is not unblemished, but believable, actual, imperfect.

Instead, her whiteness lies in the intensity of her response. Plenteous, many-centered, the Queen Anne's lace becomes a beautiful image of female desire. Each of its tiny white flowerets, like the nerve ends of the body, blossoms at the end of a network of branching stems. Each is complete in itself, a delicate circular flower, yet each also merges with others to form an orb of flowers. Small orbs merge to form larger orbs, and they in turn form the hand's span of whiteness, the individual head of Queen Anne's lace. Touch by touch she quickens; flower spills into flower until at last at the moment of *jouissance* the visceral field becomes a "pious wish to whiteness"—which, if surrender is complete, spills into the "nothing" of bliss, redeeming desire from the opposite "nothing" of failure. So beautifully does "Queen-Anne's-Lace" evoke sexual surrender, and so fully does this surrender seem to answer to the poet's longing for the sufficiency of the object, that it is dispiriting to read, in Williams' note to "A Love Song: First Version 1915," "I was

always repulsed by [Flossie]. She was never passionately loving" (*CP*, p. 479). Whatever the truth of this remark—and whatever the reasons—the feeling of "Queen-Anne's-Lace" is rare indeed in Williams' writings about the relation of marriage to desire.

I have written elsewhere about Williams' beautiful love poem to Flossie, "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower."⁵⁰ This late poem, written during a time of nearly overwhelming crisis in Williams' life, is both his fullest tribute to Flossie and his most extended meditation upon marriage. By the final lines of the poem, Williams wins through to a ringing affirmation of the power of his marriage and Flossie's forgiveness. But even in "Asphodel," Flossie's silence haunts me, despite the radiance. Hers is the transformative word, the word toward which the poem strives, and yet we do not hear her give it. "You have forgiven me / making me new again," the poet says, but "Asphodel," this poem in praise of marriage with the woman at its core, remains necessarily *his* speech, *his* quest, *his* salvation (*PB*, p. 177). And that would trouble me less, were marriage less important a theme to Williams, or were Flossie's role throughout his writings less equivocal.

A short poem ends the old *Selected Poems*,⁵¹ entitled "To Be Recited to Flossie on Her Birthday":

Let him who may
among the continuing lines
seek out

that tortured constancy
affirms
where I persist

let me say
across cross purposes
that the flower bloomed

struggling to assert itself
simply under
the conflicting lights

you will believe me
a rose
to the end of time

(*PB*, p. 35)

Like "Asphodel," this poem is a gift to Flossie. It speaks eloquently of a difficult, lasting marriage, and attests to the poet's abiding love, describing it as a flower that has struggled against all conflicts to bloom "simply." Yet as is so often the case, Williams seems to write of Flossie

egotistically, honoring her less for what she is in herself than for what she enables him to be. In "Asphodel," Williams calls that poem "a last flower," and refers to Flossie as "flowerlike" (*PB*, pp. 178, 177). This poem is a last flower, too. But he, not she, is compared to a flower. His gift to her on her birthday is not an image of her, but an image of how he thinks she imagines him: "a rose / to the end of time." The effect is ungallant, all too typical, and—in its bittersweet honesty and its longing to be worthy of the image—very moving.

¹ Naming. Critics generally refer to William Carlos Williams as Williams, and Florence Herman Williams as Floss or Flossie. The disequilibrium and inequality which are my subject in this essay are reflected in this naming. However, to call this woman Florence when she did not is equally to silence her; she seems to have thought of herself as Floss or Flossie. Therefore, and because to refer to Williams as Bill or WCW seems too breezy, I end by referring to them according to common usage. I remain uneasy, though, at the ways in which criticism—language—obscures the nonliterary.

² *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams: 1909–1939*, ed. A. Walton Litz and Christopher MacGowan (New York: New Directions, 1986), p. 56. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *CP*.

³ William Carlos Williams, *The Build-up* (New York: New Directions, 1946), p. 259. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *B*.

⁴ Paul Mariani, *William Carlos Williams: A New World Naked* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), is the fullest biographical treatment.

⁵ William Carlos Williams, *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams* (New York: New Directions, 1967), p. 55.

⁶ The phrase is on a scrap of paper dated January 15, 1950, in Williams' drafts and papers in the Collection of American Literature, Yale University Library. Paul Mariani discusses the phrase as a working title for *Paterson V*. The difference does not matter, though, since Williams originally planned that what became "Asphodel" would be *Paterson V*. See Mariani, *William Carlos Williams*, p. 701 ff.

⁷ Marilynne Robinson, *Housekeeping* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), p. 15.

⁸ William Carlos Williams, "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower," in *Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1962), p. 180. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *PB*.

⁹ William Carlos Williams, *A Dream of Love, in Many Loves and Other Plays* (New York: New Directions, 1965), p. 201. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *DL*.

¹⁰ For a thoughtful discussion of this, see Theodora R. Graham, "Williams, Flossie, and the Others: The Aesthetics of Sexuality," *Contemporary Literature* (Summer 1987), 163–86 passim. See also Tony Tanner, *Adultery in the Novel: Contract and Transgression* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1979), esp. the Introd., for an extended discussion of this in terms of the novel.

¹¹ William Carlos Williams, *Paterson* (New York: New Directions, 1963), p.

23. The phrase occurs in the passage in which Williams describes the *National Geographic* picture of an African chieftain's nine wives sitting semi-naked "in a descending scale of freshness" "astraddle a log." Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *P*.

¹² Williams' sense of the duality and complementarity of all existence is strikingly similar to the Taoist concept of *yin* and *yang*. Alan Watts writes, "they are associated with the masculine and the feminine, the firm and the yielding, the strong and the weak, the light and the dark, the rising and the falling, heaven and earth. . ." This "principle of polarity" is "not to be confused with the ideas of opposition or conflict," or with the ideas of purification and progress, that pervade Western culture. (*Tao: The Watercourse Way* [New York: Pantheon Books, 1975], pp. 21, 19.) What Taoists mean by a life and art that "goes with the grain" is very much like what Williams means by a life and art "in the American grain": a life and art lived and practiced not in domination, but in participation.

¹³ William Carlos Williams, *Kora in Hell*, in *Imaginations*, ed. Webster Schott (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 22. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *K*.

¹⁴ The phrase "Beautiful Thing" first occurs in Williams' essay on Columbus in *In the American Grain*. Williams quotes from Columbus' diaries:

On shore I sent the people for water, some with arms, and others with casks; and as it was some little distance, I waited two hours for them.

During that time I walked among the trees which was the most beautiful thing which I had ever seen . . .

(William Carlos Williams, *In the American Grain* [New York: New Directions, 1956], p. 26). The phrase comes by way of Keats's "A thing of beauty is a joy forever: Its loveliness increases; it will never / Pass into nothingness . . ." (*Endymion*), and names the central Muse figure in *Paterson*.

¹⁵ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt, 1929), p. 93.

¹⁶ Joan Nay, "William Carlos Williams and the Singular Woman," *William Carlos Williams Review*, 11 (Fall 1985), 46.

¹⁷ A letter to Marianne Moore written in 1934 eloquently expresses this sense of the self:

It is something which occurred once when I was about twenty, a sudden resignation to existence, a despair—if you wish to call it that, but a despair which made everything a unit and at the same time a part of myself. I suppose it might be called a sort of nameless religious experience. I resigned, I gave up. . . . I won't follow causes. I can't. The reason is that it seems so much more important to me that I am. Where shall one go? What shall one do? Things have no names for me and places have no significance. As a reward for this anonymity I feel as much a part of things as trees and stones. Heaven seems frankly impossible. I am damned as I succeed.

(*The Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams*, ed. John C. Thirlwall [New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1957], p. 147.) See also *Kora in Hell*, p. 17.

¹⁸ Quoted in Mariani, *William Carlos Williams*, p. 711.

¹⁹ Rachel Blau DuPlessis, "For the Estruscans," in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), pp. 278, 285.

²⁰ A partial exception to this is Cress (the poet Marcia Nardi), whose letters Williams quotes at such length in *Paterson II*. It is true that her speech exists within his—her letters within his poem—and that, as Theodora Graham has shown, Williams subtly altered Nardi's letters when quoting them in *Paterson* so as to change one's sense of her in important ways. (Theodora Graham, "‘Her Heigh Compleyne’: The Cress Letters of William Carlos Williams’ *Paterson*," in *Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams: The University of Pennsylvania Conference Papers*, ed. Daniel Hoffman [Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1983], pp. 164–93; cited in Sandra Gilbert, "Purloined Letters: William Carlos Williams and ‘Cress,’" *William Carlos Williams Review*, 11 [Fall 1985], 6.) But it is also true that Cress speaks powerfully and at length, describing her situation and leveling criticisms against Williams that—in my opinion—he cannot really dismiss or answer.

Helen and Margaret, the friends in "The Farmers' Daughters," might also seem exceptions; they are intensely present, intensely individual, and seemingly intensely available. But much of the tenderness of the story derives from the fact that Williams' relations with these women stop short of sexual fulfillment, but remain, as he says of the Thanksgiving dinner he shares with Margaret, "a despairing avowal and celebration." (In *The Farmers' Daughters: The Collected Stories of William Carlos Williams* [New York: New Directions, 1961], p. 355.)

²¹ Blau DuPlessis, "For the Estruscans," p. 286.

²² As Sandra Gilbert points out, "Beautiful Thing" is a "direct translation of the French phrase—*belle chose*—for the female genitalia . . ." ("Purloined Letters," p. 12).

²³ Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 104.

²⁴ *Ibid.* The list is Hélène Cixous's, from *La Jeune Née*, with Catherine Clément (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1975), p. 115.

²⁵ It is important to realize, of course, that feminist theory often cannot avoid binary oppositions of its own. See Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, pp. 110–20, 148, and *passim*.

²⁶ Otto Weininger, *Sex and Character* (New York: Putnam's, 1906), p. 252.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 286.

³⁰ In Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, p. 105; citing Cixous, *La Jeune Née*.

³¹ William Carlos Williams, "The Great Sex Spiral," *Egoist*, 4, No. 7 (Aug. 1917), 111.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Mariani, *William Carlos Williams*, p. 142.

³⁴ As, in *Paterson*, the poet "combs" the language from the Falls.

³⁵ The phrase occurs in Williams' essay on Daniel Boone, "The Discovery of Kentucky," in *In the American Grain*, p. 136.

³⁶ In *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams*, Williams quotes a long passage from Charles Olson's essay "Projective Verse," which discusses "OPEN, or what can also be called COMPOSITION BY FIELD, as opposed to inherited line, stanza, over-all form, what is the 'old' base of the non-projective" (p. 330). Olson, influenced by Williams' poetry, here enunciates certain principles Williams takes for his own.

³⁷ This is the rather sinister undertone in the charming poem "Danse Russe," *CP*, pp. 86-87.

³⁸ Note to "A Portrait in Greys," *CP*, p. 489: "longer lines to give the contemplative effect of quiet. Regret that we were not excited by the same things." See also Graham, "Williams, Flossie, and the Others," pp. 177-78.

³⁹ William Carlos Williams, *A Voyage to Pagany* (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 49. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *VP*.

⁴⁰ The Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, "Thee I Call 'Hamlet of Wedding-Ring,'" *Little Review*, 7 (Jan.-Mar. 1921).

⁴¹ Denise Levertov, "Williams and the Duende," in *The Poet in the World* (New York: New Directions, 1973), pp. 257-66.

⁴² The three novels are *White Mule*, *In the Money*, and *The Build-up*, published by New Directions in 1937, 1940, and 1946. Flossie and the two sons, William Eric and Paul, spent ten months in Europe, from September 1927 until July 1928. As publication dates indicate, the Stecher trilogy came into being gradually over a long period of time.

⁴³ The affinity between Williams and Charlotte is underlined in the novels by their names: Charlie/Charlotte.

⁴⁴ Williams, *The Farmers' Daughters*, p. 182. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text, as *FD*.

⁴⁵ In *The Great American Novel*, Williams writes, "I perceive that it may be permissible for a poet to write about a poetic sweetheart but never about a wife—should have said possible. It is not possible. All men do the same. Dante be damned. Knew nothing at all. Lied to himself all his life. Profited by his luck and never said thanks. God pulled the lady up by the roots. Never even said thank you. Quite wrong. Look what he produced." (In Schott, ed., *Imaginations*, p. 166.) In *A Dream of Love*, Williams' persona Doc speaks of the need to build "A woman out of his imagination to match the best," and says of this Muse figure, "That means they're not married, of course—unless he unmarries them by hard work for a moment now and then" (p. 200).

⁴⁶ Mariani, *William Carlos Williams*, p. 265. Graham also discusses this passage and "Hands across the Sea" in "Williams, Flossie, and Others," pp. 170-71.

⁴⁷ Stephen Tapscott, "Williams, Sappho, and the Woman-as-Other," *William Carlos Williams Review*, 11 (Fall 1985), 38.

⁴⁸ In *Al Que Quiere!*, for instance, "The Ogre" and "Sympathetic Portrait of a Child" speak of desire in and for little girls; "Trees," "Winter Quiet," "Dawn," and "Spring Strains" present nature as sexually ecstatic; "Smell" apostrophizes the lusts of the nose; and "Virtue" addresses adulterous lust directly: "it is the smile of her / the smell of her / the vulgar inviting mouth of her!" (*CP*, pp. 95, 94, 98, 84, 85, 97, 92, 89). The juxtaposition of these with "A Portrait in Greys" is especially painful.

⁴⁹ Note to "Queen-Anne's-Lace," *CP*, p. 498.

⁵⁰ Ann W. Fisher-Wirth, *William Carlos Williams and Autobiography: The Woods of His Own Nature* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1989), pp. 114-79.

⁵¹ William Carlos Williams, *Selected Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1969), p. 174.

The Sexual Geography of Expatriate Paris

DONALD PIZER

The American expatriate movement of the 1920s and '30s attracted much attention almost from its moment of origin, and books of every kind dealing with the phenomenon, from memoirs to anecdotal history to coffee-table art and photograph collections, continue to appear regularly.¹ The movement, however, has received surprisingly little attention as a body of literary expression with its own significant shape.² I would like therefore to offer an account of what I believe is one of the more compelling characteristics of this shape—the common positioning in the work of the best expatriate authors of the union of creativity and sexuality in a distinctive Paris locale. I will discuss principally autobiographical accounts by Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, Henry Miller, and Anaïs Nin, and novels by Hemingway, John Dos Passos, and F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Let me begin with a suggestive precursor of this tendency toward the identification of Paris with a fusing of sexual and artistic expression. In a much remarked scene in *The Ambassadors*, Lambert Strether, who has led a gray personal and artistic life in Woollett, lectures the youthful Little Bilham in Gloriani's garden on the need to "Live all you can." For Strether, Paris, with its open cultivation of and respect for art and with its undercurrent of sexuality, is the life he has not had, and the garden of the artist Gloriani is an apt setting for his recognition of the absence of beauty and fulfillment in his experience and of his desire to turn this recognition into admonitory use. Of course, for James the sexual element in the moment is far from explicit. It lies in Strether's growing awareness that "life" for Chad Newsome is at least in part his affair with Madame de Vionnet and in the suggestiveness of the garden setting.

For the next generation of American expatriate writers, the sexuality of this kind of moment becomes more pronounced, until we will eventually find ourselves sharing one of Henry Miller's whorehouse epiphanies.

This transition into clarity and emphasis is apparent in Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast*, a work which, though written in the late 1950s, fully expresses Hemingway's lifelong attitudes toward the Paris scene of his early career. In the opening chapter of *A Movable Feast*, a chapter which seeks to epitomize the meaning of Paris for a young American writer of the early 1920s, Hemingway makes his way from his apartment in the inhospitable Place Contrescarpe *quartier* to a "good" café on the Place St. Michel. There, as he begins to write one of the stories of *In Our Time*, an attractive girl enters the café:

I looked at her and she disturbed me and made me very excited. I wished I could put her in the story, or anywhere, but she had placed herself so she could watch the street and the entry and I knew she was waiting for someone. So I went on writing.

The story was writing itself and I was having a hard time keeping up with it. I ordered another rum St. James and I watched the girl whenever I looked up, or when I sharpened the pencil with a pencil sharpener. . . .

I've seen you, beauty, and you belong to me now, whoever you are waiting for and if I never see you again, I thought. You belong to me and all Paris belongs to me and I belong to this notebook and this pencil.

Then I went back to writing and I entered far into the story and was lost in it. . . . Then the story was finished and I was very tired. . . .

I closed up the story in the notebook and put it in my inside pocket and I asked the waiter for a dozen *portugaises* and a half-carafe of the dry white wine they had there. After writing a story I was always empty and both sad and happy, as though I had made love. . . .³

The incident is beautifully transparent. The act of writing well, with one's sharpened pencil, is like the act of making love to an attractive girl. Both, in this instance, are acts of the imagination, and thus both maintain their purity. Indeed, because the act of writing is also the only physical act of the moment, the single act of placing pencil to paper constitutes a powerful and productive union of the forces present in sexual desire and in creative energy, or, in other terms, in body and spirit. And "a warm and clean and friendly"⁴ Paris café is the site of this joining of sexuality and creativity in artistic expression. Hemingway's emphasis on the role of masculine sexual hunger in the

fecund artistic matrix of the “good” café is comically endorsed by a later scene in *A Moveable Feast*. He has moved to Montparnasse and is preparing for a writing session at his favorite café, the Closerie des Lilas, when he is joined by a homosexual acquaintance whose mindless chatter destroys the possibility of work. For Hemingway, in short, creativity is a heterosexual force. It is no wonder that in his irritation he advises the acquaintance, who has aspirations to be a writer, that his true métier is undoubtedly literary criticism.

At first glance a very different union of sexuality and creativity is at the center of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Gertrude Stein's account of her complementary heroic roles as discoverer and champion of pictorial modernism and as practitioner and aesthetician of literary modernism is also a kind of sentimental domestic novel. She and Alice Toklas meet, decide to join their lives, and then live together happily ever after in their charming house on Rue de Fleurus, where they entertain many interesting artists and writers. The frontispiece photograph of the anonymously issued first edition of the *Autobiography* renders this domestic image.⁵ The photograph, by Man Ray, depicts Stein writing at her desk in the large single-room atelier which adjoins their living quarters while Alice Toklas is entering at the door. The artist is at work (work which also includes the writing of the *Autobiography*), the artist's companion and aid temporarily joins her, no doubt on some domestic errand. The underlying but never openly expressed theme of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, in brief, is that it is largely the happy and successful “marriage” of Gertrude and Alice which has permitted Stein to pursue her triumphant career. The *Autobiography*, indeed, has often been misinterpreted by casual readers as excessively egotistical because of Stein's frequent comments on her own importance. It has not always been realized that these remarks are a form of love letter to Toklas, whose domestic skills, companionship, and love have made possible the full flowering of Stein's creative powers.

Man Ray's photograph is also significant because it stresses that the center of the Stein-Toklas union at 27 Rue de Fleurus is the salon or atelier. It is here, at countless dinners and soirees, in a room whose walls are lined with the masterpieces of the new art, that the course of modernism is determined and charted. Here, too, as in Hemingway's good café, sexuality and creativity join in a distinctive Paris setting in which the trope of this union relies heavily on the sexual but nevertheless subsumes the sexual under the artistic expression which is the permanent and significant product of the moment.

Despite an appearance to the contrary, this same stress on the "spiritual" consequences of the sexuality inherent in artistic expression is also present in Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*. In a characteristic incident of *Tropic of Cancer*, Miller is asked to aid a young Indian disciple of Gandhi who has been sent to Europe to spread the gospel of his master. More specifically, he is asked to guide the disciple, who has been wearied by his efforts, on a whorehouse visit. There then follows the initially farcical incident of the Indian using a bidet for a toilet and producing two large turds, much to the dismay of the prostitute and madam. The next night, Miller again accompanies the young disciple in his pursuit of "the fucking business." Once in a low dive of a brothel, Miller begins to meditate on the previous night's events. Gradually, he pushes toward an insight. Man, he realizes, has devoted his energy throughout time in pursuit of miracles to confirm impossible beliefs:

And out of the endless torment and misery no miracle comes forth, no microscopic vestige even of relief. Only ideas, pale, attenuated ideas which have to be fattened [for] slaughter; ideas which come forth like bile, like the guts of a pig when the carcass is ripped open.

And so I think what a miracle it would be if this miracle which man attends eternally should turn out to be nothing more than these two enormous turds which the faithful disciple dropped in the *bidet*. What if at the last moment, when the banquet table is set and the cymbals clash, there should appear suddenly, and wholly without warning, a silver platter on which even the blind could see that there is nothing more, and nothing less, than two enormous lumps of shit. . . .

Somehow the realization that nothing was to be hoped for had a salutary effect upon me. For weeks and months, for years, in fact, all my life I had been looking forward to something happening, some extrinsic event that would alter my life, and now suddenly, inspired by the absolute hopelessness of everything, I felt relieved, felt as though a great burden had been lifted from my shoulders. . . . Walking toward Montparnasse I decided to let myself drift with the tide, to make not the least resistance to fate, no matter in what form it presented itself. Nothing that had happened to me thus far had been sufficient to destroy me; nothing had been destroyed except my illusions. I myself was intact. . . . I made up my mind that I would hold on to nothing, that I would expect nothing, that henceforth I would live as an animal, a beast of prey, a rover, a plunderer. . . . One must burrow into life again to put on flesh. The word must become flesh; the soul thirsts. On whatever crumb my eye fastens, I will pounce and devour. If to live is the paramount

thing, then I will live, even if I must become a cannibal. Heretofore I have been trying to save my precious hide, trying to preserve the few pieces of meat that hid my bones. I am done with that. I have reached the limits of endurance. My back is to the wall. I can retreat no further. As far as history goes I am dead. If there is something beyond I shall have to bounce back. I have found God, but he is insufficient. I am only spiritually dead. Physically I am alive. Morally I am free. The world which I have departed is a menagerie. The dawn is breaking on a new world, a jungle world in which the lean spirits roam with sharp claws. If I am a hyena I am a lean and hungry one; I go forth to fatten myself.⁶

Miller has in this passage crystallized, within a context and in a form that parodies the traditional language and motifs of religious mysticism, the essence of his creative rebirth in Paris. Throughout history, he now understands at last, the search for meaning in life by the faithful has produced merde. Recognition of this truth can lead only to an acceptance of life and man as they are—free of cant and convention—and in this acceptance of life, this burrowing into what is real, the thirst of the soul for spiritual meaning in life will paradoxically be met. Miller has dramatized a moment of mystical insight that begins with two turds in a Paris whorehouse and ends with a new birth of creative freedom and power arising out of an acceptance of the elemental union of body and soul.

A striking sexual radicalism thus appears to underlie these various Paris scenes in which American expatriate writers of the 1920s and '30s explore the rise and nature of their creativity. Hemingway's fantasies of sex with an unknown girl while the faithful Hadley prepares lunch at home, Stein's lesbian establishment at the Rue de Fleurus, and Miller's whorehouse all seem to represent a sharp break with the conventionally acceptable in belief and behavior, a break that appears to be attributable principally to the Paris scenes in which they are set. But before accepting this notion at face value, it might be well to consider Miller's comment in *Tropic of Cancer*: "Of itself Paris initiates no dramas. They are begun elsewhere. Paris is simply an obstetrical instrument that tears the living embryo from the womb and puts it in the incubator. Paris is the cradle of artificial births. Rocking here in the cradle each one slips back into his soil. . ."⁷ Seen in this light, the scenes and settings I have been describing may owe their surface sexual sensationalism to their distinctively Parisian settings, but the core values of the moments are indeed often closely related to traditional and frequently conservative American faiths. Thus, Hemingway's joining of sexual fantasy and

artistic creation is at heart (as seen particularly when related to the parallel café scene at the Closerie des Lilas) a celebration of masculine heterosexuality of an almost undergraduate conventionality, while the home at 27 Rue de Fleurus is above all just that—a home where traditional middle-class male and female roles within a nineteenth-century model of marital domesticity are played out. And Miller's whorehouse is primarily a striking and provocative extension into modern Paris of Whitman's and Thoreau's man in the open air freeing himself from worn-out creeds and embracing as a new faith both his own energizing spirit and all that grows and lives in nature. Most American writers in Paris, in short, were still principally American writers. Paris encouraged not so much the expression of new and radical faiths as the restatement of traditional beliefs in the new and radical forms of an open sexuality and an evocative Paris locale.

It is, indeed, only in the diary of Anaïs Nin that a full-blown radical belief—one which anticipates a major characteristic of postmodern thought—begins to emerge. Nin, of course, offers special problems in any effort to discuss her work in the context of the American expatriate movement. Born in France of Cuban parents, fluent in several languages, and resident in America for only a decade before her move to Paris in 1925 at the age of twenty-two,⁸ she can perhaps be considered as much a twentieth-century cosmopolitan as an American. In addition, the volume of her diary for which she is best known, *The Diary of Anaïs Nin, 1931–1934*, first published in 1966, is, we now realize from the recently published *Henry and June: From the Unexpurgated Diary of Anaïs Nin* (1986), a heavily revised work, with significant omissions and changes. Nevertheless, because of Nin's emphasis on the relationship of sexuality to creativity in a Paris setting, and because of her close association with Henry Miller and other American expatriates of the 1930s, it is both possible and useful to consider her writing as within the American expatriate movement. To do so adequately, however, it is necessary to conflate the two versions of her diary of the early 1930s—to see them not as irreconcilable in their often variant accounts but rather as representing, in their totality, the full dimensions of her interpretation of a specific moment in her life.

The event that I will discuss is that of a visit to a whorehouse in March 1932. At this time, Nin was living in the Paris suburb of Louveciennes with her husband Hugh (usually called Hugo) Guiler, a banker. Nin's years in Paris, and especially her attempt to write a study of D. H. Lawrence, had led her to believe that she was engaged in a process of self-discovery. This awareness intensified greatly in

December 1931, when she met Henry Miller and his wife June. Quickly, Nin fell in love with both Miller and June, while still continuing to live with and often to feel deeply in touch with her husband. The visit to the whorehouse occurs at this profoundly complex moment in Nin's emotional life.

In the 1966 *Diary* version of the incident, it is Henry who suggests that he and Nin visit a whorehouse at 32 Rue Blondel. They are entertained by two whores performing various sex acts. One, a dark woman, plays the masculine role, the other—Younger, smaller, and blonde—the feminine. All is on a bantering level both for the whore and for Henry and Anaïs

until. . . . The small woman had been lying on her back with her legs open. The big woman removed the penis and kissed the small woman's clitoris. She flicked her tongue over it, caressed it, kissed. The small woman's eyes closed and we could see she was enjoying it. She began to moan and tremble with pleasure. She offered to our eyes her quivering body and raised herself a little to meet the voracious mouth of the bigger woman. And then came the climax for her and she let out a cry of joy. Then she lay absolutely still. Breathing fast. A moment later they both stood up, joking, and the mood passed.⁹

In *Henry and June*, it is Hugo and Anaïs who visit the whorehouse on Rue Blondel, and now it is Anaïs' suggestion. Again Anaïs and her companion observe the prostitutes:

Hugo and I look on, laughing a little at their sallies. We learn nothing new. It is all unreal, until I ask for the lesbian poses.

The little woman loves it, loves it better than the man's approach. The big woman reveals to me a secret place in the woman's body, a source of a new joy, which I had sometimes sensed but never definitely—that small core at the opening of the woman's lips, just what the man passes by. There, the big woman works with the flicking of her tongue. The little woman closes her eyes, moans and trembles in ecstasy. Hugo and I lean over them, taken by that moment of loveliness in the little woman, who offers to our eyes her conquered, quivering body. Hugo is in a turmoil. I am no longer woman; I am man. I am touching the core of June's being. . . .

And when we returned home, he adored my body because it was lovelier than what he had seen and we sank into sensuality together with new realization. We were killing phantoms.¹⁰

Hugo Guiler and Henry Miller were still alive in 1966, and it was for this reason that Nin omitted from her *Diary* both any mention of her husband and all explicit sexuality in her accounts of her relationship to

Miller and June. But that Nin could in good conscience replace Hugo with Henry in the 1966 version, and that she had in her original version also linked her sexual excitement to June, reveal the essential truth encapsulated in both versions of the event—a truth which also draws upon the fact that it was Nin who prompted the visit to the whorehouse. For the moment dramatizes the possibility of a sexual awakening independent of a distinctive partner or agent in the awakening—a sexual awakening, in other words, in which the principal emphasis is on the meaning of the awakening for selfhood rather than for a specific personal relationship. The heavy whore is male and female interchangeably, but in the end she is primarily an activating force—a tongue—playing a role in the fulfillment of a pleasure that is confined to the clitoris of the smaller whore. And so for Anaïs, for whom this scene comes at a crucial moment in her self-discovery, there is a realization—first felt and later more fully understood—that Henry, Hugo, and June are in a sense interchangeable activating principles in bringing her to self-awareness. What is significant is that it is she who has been brought to life, that it is she who in the discovery of the intensity of her sensual nature has entered deeply into the process of self-identification and thus ultimately of self-expression.

No wonder, then, that Nin during this scene makes love to June in her imagination and that she and Hugo make love that night and that she and Henry make love for the first time a few days afterward. Nin's point is not the celebration of a female Don Juanism, of a liberated sexuality in which sex is an aim in itself, but rather in the announcement of a sexuality which is so powerfully oriented toward self-discovery that it reaches, in its final joining of body and soul, a form of epiphany. So, shortly after the scene in the whorehouse, Nin writes (in *Henry and June*) of her lovemaking with Henry: "That last afternoon in Henry's hotel room was for me like a white-hot furnace. Before, I had only white heat of the mind and of the imagination; now it is of the blood. Sacred completeness."¹¹

Nin's "sacred completeness" is both similar to and different from the union of creative energy and sexual expression that I have described in the work of Hemingway and Stein and even of Miller. There is in these writers a discovery in Paris of a sexuality that is also a liberation of the imagination. But for Nin, this discovery is so profoundly solipsistic that it results in the creation of a new thing, though it was to be some time before Nin herself knew what it was she had created. For in Nin's diary, the discovery of sex is itself a liberation from the bonds of sexuality insofar as the fulfillment of sexual need

implied—as it did for Hemingway, Stein, and Miller—the acceptance of a body of traditional belief. For Nin, experience was now a blank page to be written on by her capacity to feel. As she wrote shortly after recording her sense of “sacred completeness,” “The important thing is the response to life.”¹² This may also have been Miller’s creed. But for Nin, one senses, far less intellectual baggage accompanied the declaration, and there was also for her a far greater acceptance of the autocracy of the feeling self.

I have so far confined myself to autobiographies, considering for purposes of this discussion *Tropic of Cancer* as a form of spiritual autobiography. In this kind of writing, the obstetrical function of Paris is of course portrayed in a positive light. The birth is successfully accomplished; indeed, the principal intent of each work is to depict the emergence and triumph of the creative imagination within a Paris context. But it should be clear as well that each of the scenes or moments I have discussed contains a darker potential—the frustration of the girl longed for but not in fact had, the complex emotions locked within the walls of the unmentioned bedroom of the Rue de Fleurus, the degradation of the spirit inherent in the act of prostitution. It is in the fiction of the American expatriates of this period that this tragic potential in the effort to achieve a wholeness and intensity of creative expression in a Paris setting is explored and dramatized. In such scenes as that of the impotent Jake at the *bal musette* in *The Sun Also Rises*, or Dick Diver caught between the competing claims of Nicole and Rosemary in *Tender Is the Night*, or Richard Savage seeking to resolve the problem of Daughter’s pregnancy in *Nineteen-Nineteen*—in these scenes the sexuality of Paris becomes the symbolic analogue not of creative energy and freedom but of a bitterly ironic failure to achieve what is so urgently desired. The artist manqué figures of Jake and Dick and Savage, like the self-portraits of Hemingway, Stein, Miller, and Nin, also seek some vital expression of self, but now the open sexuality of their worlds mocks rather than aids in its fulfillment.

This in part comic and in part pathetic use of Parisian sexuality in the depiction of artistic impotence is nowhere clearer than in the *bal musette* scene early in *The Sun Also Rises*. Every sexual thread in this richly textured moment contributes to the theme of spiritual failure and frustration in the novel as a whole. The larger dimension of the scene is that of a parody of the romantic tragedy foreshadowed by the Capulet ball in *Romeo and Juliet*. In both scenes, two lovers meet accidentally at a dance. But now, instead of the mix of youthful sexual eagerness and innocence that pervades the moment in Shakespeare, all is sexual

falseness and incompleteness in which the various sexual roles displayed approach the level of a Hogarth caricature. There is physical impotency (Jake), homosexuality (the young men accompanying Brett and the writer Prentiss), nymphomania with perhaps a lesbian base (Brett), prostitution (Georgette), and simple lust (Cohn). Hemingway has saturated the scene with sexual behavior and attitudes which to his mind lack both honesty and completeness. There will be neither triumphant fulfillment nor tragic grandeur in these lives but rather the pathos of a vast impotence of the spirit, an impotence which for Hemingway is of course also that of the creative imagination.

Toward the conclusion of *Nineteen-Nineteen*, Dick Savage has reached a crucial stage in his career. The earlier powerful repugnance of his artistic temperament toward the slaughter and lies of the war has given way to an accommodation to the power of the established social and political forces responsible for the war. We thus find him in early 1919 an Army officer at the Paris Peace Conference. He has also begun to associate with the entourage of J. Ward Moorehouse with an eye toward a position in Moorehouse's public relations firm at the end of the conference. It is at this point that Dick meets Ann Elizabeth (Daughter) in Rome. In her youthful vitality and honesty, she constitutes a counterforce to Eleanor Stoddard, Moorehouse's companion, who speaks for the prostitution of Dick's talent. On the night they make love for the first time, Daughter tells him, "You're an artist, Dick, and I love you very much . . . you're my poet, Dick."¹³

Dick's dilemma, as is often true of Dos Passos' characters, has an allegorical cast, with sexual symbolism playing a major role in the allegory. Daughter's giving of herself (she had been a virgin) was an act of love expressed toward the best side of his character, that of Dick as artist. Eleanor, on the other hand, is sexually frigid. Her life is played out in relationships in which social power—here as an agent for Moorehouse—substitutes for personal emotional fulfillment. She wishes to lure Dick out of the sexually complete and potentially artistically fruitful relationship with Daughter and into the sexually and artistically impotent world of Moorehouse.

The final act in this ethical melodrama is played out in Dick's Paris hotel room. Daughter has become pregnant, and after several vain efforts to involve Dick in her predicament, she has come to Paris to state her need. Dick, in the meantime, has fully accepted a future posited on Eleanor's values. She has cautioned him that "an unsuitable marriage has been the ruination of many a promising young fellow,"¹⁴ and Moorehouse has promised him a job in New York.

With Daughter now four months' pregnant, Dick—as they talk in his room—tries to cajole and then pressure her out of a belief that he has any commitment toward her. He initially pleads the needs of his career, then suggests that she might consider marrying somebody else, and finally spits out, “if you'd taken proper precautions.”¹⁵ Daughter at last realizes and accepts Dick's essential weakness and meanness of spirit and leaves. Dick, as he later lies in his cold bed, is at first troubled by thoughts of Daughter, but “gradually he got warmer” as he thinks of the pleasures of the day and the life to come—“twilight tea at Eleanor's, make her talk to Moorehouse to clinch job after the signing of the peace.”¹⁶ Dick has, by his dismissal of the pregnant Daughter, sealed his own fate in life. Our final glimpse of him, in *The Big Money*, is as Moorehouse's heir apparent in a powerful New York advertising firm. The cost of this success is revealed by his prostitution of his artistry in advertising slogans and by the emergence in him of a latent and self-destructive homosexuality.

In the Paris portion of *Tender Is the Night*, we shift from Rosemary's earlier ingenuous vision of Dick and Nicole as charming and gracious prince and princess of a sunlit kingdom by the sea to a full revelation of the malaise at the center of their lives, with Parisian sexuality serving as the symbolic reflection of this condition. The climax of this revelation—both for Rosemary and for us—is preceded by a series of instances in the Paris setting of false or failed sexuality. We learn of Abe North's unrequited sexual longing for Nicole and of Rosemary's deep necking with a Yale undergraduate in a railway compartment in the context of a visit by Dick and Rosemary to a lesbian cocktail party, of an American woman shooting her English lover at the Gare St. Lazare, and of Dick and Rosemary's furtive kissing in taxicabs.

These half-sinister, half-comic revelations and incidents come to a head in Rosemary's discovery in her hotel bed of a recently murdered black man. Dick and Rosemary had been sitting on her bed kissing when they had been interrupted by Abe North and the black man Peterson. They then all went across the hall to the Divers' suite, and later Peterson had gone into the hall. When Rosemary returns to her room she finds the dead Peterson on her bed.

Fitzgerald's intent in the elaborate setting up and choreographing of this scene is to dramatize a powerful sexual symbolism. As Rosemary and Dick sit kissing on her bed, with Nicole in her room across the hall, the deception and falseness of their situation have begun to be apparent to them both. Rosemary has become increasingly aware of Nicole's neurotic possessiveness and of Dick's roles of poise and control, and

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Dick has realized the nature of Rosemary's essentially adolescent infatuation with him. "Oh, we're such *actors*,"¹⁷ Rosemary tells Dick.

Peterson's blood had soiled Rosemary's coverlet and blanket. Dick replaces them with those from his and Nicole's bed and then moves the body into the corridor. At this point Nicole retreats into the bathroom and collapses, as she had on the Riviera when she had begun to sense Dick's interest in Rosemary. Dick's exchange of their bedclothes for Rosemary's bloody bedclothes had for her signified Dick's further betrayal, and her collapse is her means of asserting her prior and greater need—an appeal that she knows will be honored by Dick now as it had been in the past. All, in other words, is clashing sexual need—the unfulfilled demands of Rosemary and Dick, she for a father figure, he for an adoring and ego-flattering love, and the powerful sexual possessiveness and manipulation of Nicole. The bloodied bedclothes are thus an apt symbol of the sexual warfare of the moment, a warfare in which the ostensible hero of the moment, Dick, is rather its principal victim both in the failure of his desperate reaching out to Rosemary and in his submitting once again to Nicole's emotional blackmail. Despite his having kissed a beautiful young movie star in her hotel room not long after having had sex with his wife, it is he who is being emasculated in body and spirit and who will eventually be discarded by both Rosemary and Nicole as a worn-out hulk, his creative energy as a research scientist (*read* artist) rendered permanently impotent.

American expatriate writers of the postwar period thus had no single attitude toward the sexuality that they viewed as inseparable from life in Paris. For some, sexual openness and freedom served to confirm traditional beliefs, while for others it led either to a deeply iconoclastic stance or to the dramatization of modern versions of man's tragic limitations. It is not entirely clear, however, why the more affirmative portrayals of Paris sexuality occur in autobiographies and the more tragic in novels, though undoubtedly the very nature of these forms plays a significant role in the difference.

The autobiographical writer is of course seeking to identify those characteristics of his experience that constitute the source of his distinctiveness and worth, as in Hemingway's account of the impact of Paris upon him in *A Moveable Feast*, while the writer of fiction, as in the same author's *The Sun Also Rises*, is usually attempting to render a more general theme—Jake Barnes, for example, as a reflection of the loss of value in his generation. *Tropic of Cancer*, because of its mixed autobiographical and fictional modes, offers up both tendencies. Miller sharply distinguishes between his own growth in the Paris milieu and

the destructive effect of the city on his fellow expatriates. But whether the sexual geography of Paris was that of the flourishing and fecund garden found in many autobiographical accounts, or that of the wasteland of much fictional representation, there can be little doubt of the power and attractiveness to the American expatriate imagination of the 1920s and 1930s of the trope that united sexuality and creativity in the city of light.

¹ Perhaps the most useful of the many general accounts of the movement are those by Humphrey Carpenter, *Geniuses Together: American Writers in Paris in the 1920s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1987), and George Wickes, *Americans in Paris* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1969). A standard collection of biographical sketches can be found in Karen L. Rood, ed., *American Writers in Paris, 1920–1939*, Vol. 4 in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Detroit: Gale, 1980).

² A notable exception is Benstock's *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900–1940* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1986). Benstock's study, however, includes British authors and is limited to women.

³ Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast* (1964; rpt. New York: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 5–6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵ Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (New York: Harcourt, 1933).

⁶ Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer* (1934; rpt. New York: Grove Press, 1960), pp. 97–99.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁸ Authoritative biographical information about Nin is still difficult to acquire. Probably the best brief account can be found in Gunther Stuhlmann's introduction to *A Literate Passion: Letters of Anaïs Nin and Henry Miller, 1932–1953* (New York: Harcourt, 1987).

⁹ Anaïs Nin, *The Diary of Anaïs Nin*, ed. Gunther Stuhlmann (Swallow Press, 1966), p. 60.

¹⁰ Anaïs Nin, *Henry and June: From the Unexpurgated Diary of Anaïs Nin*, ed. Rupert Pole (New York: Harcourt, 1986), pp. 71–72.

¹¹ Nin, *Henry and June*, p. 77.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 89.

¹³ John Dos Passos, *Nineteen-Nineteen* (1932; rpt. in U.S.A., New York: Modern Library, 1938), p. 375.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 393.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 396.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 397.

¹⁷ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night* (1934; rpt. New York: Macmillan, 1987), p. 105.

Conrad's Influence on Modern Writers

JEFFREY MEYERS

A thorough study of Joseph Conrad's influence would require a whole book.¹ In this essay, I want to describe, for the first time and in general, the enormous extent of his legacy. I hope that in future work others will explore and elaborate the specific details. Conrad has affected not only novelists, but also some playwrights and poets, and his influence has lasted until today. Though Conrad's major novels have had the greatest impact, nearly twenty of his works, from *Almayer's Folly* (1895) to *Suspense* (1925), have influenced at least thirty-five American, Latin American, English, German, French, and Polish authors.

Conrad was still writing when the first generation of modern authors reached maturity around the time of the Great War. His techniques and themes, his passionate concern with the "tragedy of existence, the weakness of human nature, political violence, fidelity to lost causes, human dignity, the weight of moral responsibility, and the rigid demands of art"² as well as his serious, vital ideas—moral transgression and individual responsibility, lost honor and personal redemption, the terrors of loneliness and consolation of the secret sharer—have profoundly appealed to the modern sensibility, which he helped to create.

In "Swinburne as Poet" (1920), T. S. Eliot praised Conrad's idiom, a precursor of the current avant-garde, for expressing the spirit of the age: "the language which is more important to us [than Swinburne's] is that which is struggling to digest and express new objects, new groups of objects, new feelings, new aspects, as, for instance, in the prose of Mr. James Joyce or the earlier Conrad."³ Eliot, an obsessive borrower, makes good use of this language. The biblical-sounding line from Book I of *The Waste Land* (1922), "I will show you fear in a handful of dust," which

provided the title of Evelyn Waugh's novel of 1934, was taken from a thematic phrase in "Youth": "the triumphant conviction of strength, the heat of life in the handful of dust."⁴ And the pessimistic observation in *Burnt Norton* (1936): "Human kind / Cannot bear very much reality," comes directly from Winnie Verloc's belief in *The Secret Agent*: "She felt profoundly that things do not stand much looking into."⁵

The original epigraph of *The Waste Land*, deleted on Pound's advice, was Kurtz's brilliantly suggestive words: "The horror! The horror!" They could refer to Kurtz's fascination with the African jungle, his recognition of what it did to him, his self-pity, his realization that he must die, the condemnation of his personal corruption, or his perception of the possibility of evil in all men. They certainly suggest that though he has been conquered by a lust for power, he has retained his moral conscience. The lost souls in *The Waste Land* also strive for this devastating self-knowledge.

Conrad actually supplied the epigraph ("Mistah Kurtz—he dead") as well as the character and content of "The Hollow Men" (1925). In the Congo men have to meet the destructive chaos with their own inborn strength. But this is impossible for the Europeans who lack internal resources. The accountant is like a hairdresser's dummy, the manager has nothing within him, the brickmaker is a papier-mâché Mephistopheles. Their hollowness expresses "the negativity, the vacuity, the lack of desire, and the 'tepid skepticism' which inform . . . the whole of 'The Hollow Men.'"⁶

Eliot's contemporary Eugene O'Neill, following Conrad's example, worked on ships as a young man. He studied Conrad carefully and had a complete set of Conrad's works at Tao House in Danville, California, where he lived from 1937 until 1944. Travis Bogard writes that until 1920, Conrad's impact on O'Neill "was deeper than that of any other writer."⁷ Bogard shows the influence of "The End of the Tether" on O'Neill's one-act play *Warnings* (1914), of "Tomorrow" on his only story, *Tomorrow* (1917), of *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* on *Bound East for Cardiff* (1916), and of *Heart of Darkness* on *The Emperor Jones* (1920). Unfortunately, Conrad did not reciprocate O'Neill's admiration. When asked by a Polish interviewer about the phrase, "that old devil, the sea," in *Anna Christie*, Conrad bridled up, exposed the playwright's weakness, and exclaimed: "That's exactly how I feel but I wouldn't put it in quite the same words as Mr. O'Neill; he has no sense of style."⁸

Conrad's influence was particularly powerful on the three major writers who were born a decade after Eliot and O'Neill: Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner. In 1923, while working as a reporter on the

Toronto *Daily Star*, Hemingway went up to Sudbury, north of Lake Huron in Canada, to expose a fake coal company and consoled himself by reading *The Rover* in the Nickel Range Hotel. "When morning came I had used up all my Conrad like a drunkard," Hemingway wrote, describing himself as Conrad's literary heir. "I had hoped it would last me the trip, and felt like a young man who has blown in his patrimony."⁹

The following year, back in Paris, Hemingway contributed to the "Conrad Supplement" of Ford Madox Ford's *Transatlantic Review*, which appeared shortly after Conrad's death. The young Hemingway, just beginning his literary career, paid tribute to the novelist by favorably comparing him (in his worst jocular style) to Eliot, who had recently published *The Waste Land*, and by acknowledging the lesson of the master: "If I knew that by grinding Mr. Eliot into a fine dry powder and sprinkling that powder over Mr. Conrad's grave Mr. Conrad would shortly appear, looking very annoyed at the forced return and commence writing, I would leave for London early tomorrow morning with a sausage grinder." Hemingway concluded by affirming: "from nothing else that I have ever read have I gotten what every book of Conrad has given me."¹⁰

Conrad's emphasis on stoicism, on a heroic ethos and a code of honor, and on testing oneself in violent and extreme situations, profoundly affected Hemingway. In *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) he adopts Stein's phrase about Lord Jim, "one of us," to characterize Count Mippipopolous, who had been wounded by arrows in Abyssinia.¹¹ And the description of Ricardo carefully shaving before meeting Lena in *Victory* may have influenced "all that barbering" that Robert Cohn does to prepare himself for Brett Ashley. In *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) Catherine Barkley is as completely self-effacing as Lena, who tells Heyst: "if you were to stop thinking of me I shouldn't be in the world at all! . . . I can only be what you think I am."¹² "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" (1936) re-creates the great Conradian theme of moral failure and recovery of self-esteem just as *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952) portrays Conrad's theme of victory in defeat.

Conrad's belief in "scrupulous fidelity to the truth of my own sensations," expressed in his Author's Note to *Within the Tides*,¹³ is echoed in Hemingway's desire to portray "the actual things which produced the emotion that you experienced."¹⁴ The most important lesson came from Conrad's aesthetic pronouncement, the Preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* which stressed the visual element in fiction: "My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written

word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you see.”¹⁵ Hemingway repeated this artistic credo when he insisted that the novelist must “find what gave you the emotion; what the action was that gave you the excitement. Then write it down making it clear so the reader will see it too.”¹⁶

A description of a Mediterranean landscape from *The Rover*—which resembles a cinematic tracking-shot that moves from the sky and the mountains to the trees on the plain and the red-tiled roofs of the farmhouses—shows quite precisely how Hemingway learned from and imitated Conrad in *The Sun Also Rises*:

There were leaning pines on the skyline, and in the pass itself dull silvery green patches of olive orchards below a long yellow wall backed by dark cypresses, and the red roofs of buildings which seemed to belong to a farm.¹⁷

[The mountains] were wooded and there were clouds coming down from them. The green plain stretched off. It was cut by fences and the white of the road showed through the trunks of a double line of trees that crossed the plain toward the north. As we came to the edge of the rise we saw the red roofs and the white houses of Burguete ahead strung out on the plain.¹⁸

Later on, the older Hemingway was more severe on Conrad's character. In February 1944 Hemingway, distracted by the war, criticized Conrad's self-pity and complaints (following the agonized tradition of Flaubert) in a letter to his editor, Max Perkins: “I miss writing very much Max. You see, unlike the people who belabored it as a dog's life *ce métier de chien* Conrad and old Ford were always suffering about. I loved to write very much and was never happier than doing it.”¹⁹

Fitzgerald, also a keen student of Conrad, shared Hemingway's admiration of his art and discussed Conrad's technique with his friend. During Conrad's celebrated visit to America in 1923, Fitzgerald, in a characteristically childish episode, got drunk with Ring Lardner and danced on the lawn of the Doubleday estate in Oyster Bay, where Conrad was staying, in order to pay homage to the novelist. But he was apprehended by the caretaker and thrown off the grounds for trespassing before he could gate-crash the house and attract Conrad's attention.

Fitzgerald's letters reveal that Conrad's art was a constant touchstone for his own. He cited *Nostromo* as “the great novel of the past fifty years,”²⁰ and explained his choice in a letter to Fanny Butcher of the *Chicago Tribune*:

I'd rather have written Conrad's *Nostromo* than any other novel . . . because *Nostromo*, the man, intrigues me so much. . . [Conrad] took this man of the people and imagined him with such a completeness that there is no use of any one else pondering over him for some time. He is one of the most important types in our civilization . . . one that always made a haunting and irresistible appeal to me.²¹

In June 1925, Fitzgerald told H. L. Mencken that he had "learned a lot from [Conrad]" and had consciously imitated him in *The Great Gatsby* (1925). This influence can be seen in Fitzgerald's style, symbolism, plot, narrator (Nick Carraway is modeled on Charlie Marlow), and theme of romantic illusion.²² Both Hemingway and Fitzgerald learned from Conrad to use a more subtle and suggestive conclusion in their fiction. As Fitzgerald remarked to John Peale Bishop in April 1934: "It was Ernest Hemingway who developed to me, in conversation [and demonstrated in the last sentence of *A Farewell to Arms*] that the dying fall was preferable to the dramatic ending under certain conditions, and I think we both got the germ of the idea from Conrad."²³ Two months later, speaking of *Tender is the Night* (1934), Fitzgerald told Hemingway: "The theory back of it I got from Conrad's preface to *The Nigger*, that the purpose of a work of fiction is to appeal to the lingering after-effects in the reader's mind."²⁴

Fitzgerald may also have been thinking of Conrad's Author's Note to *Youth*, where he explained the lingering musical effect he intended to achieve in the last sentence of *Heart of Darkness*: "That sombre theme had to be given a sinister resonance, a tonality of its own, a continued vibration that, I hoped, would hang in the air and dwell on the ear after the last note had been struck."²⁵ Conrad concluded his dark novella by connecting the Thames to the collective unconscious of the Congo: "The tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed sombre under an overcast sky—seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness." Fitzgerald, adopting the psychological suggestion of the riverine metaphor, imitated Conrad's technique in his concluding sentence: "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."

Faulkner, like Fitzgerald, said he "got quite a lot from Conrad."²⁶ He claimed to have read Conrad every year, and listed *Heart of Darkness* and *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* among his favorite books. He stated: "the two books I like best are *Moby Dick* and *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"*" and echoed Fitzgerald's phrase about *Nostromo*: "I'd just like to have written those two books more than any others I can think of."²⁷

Faulkner tramped through Kent in October 1925, admired the "quietest most restful country under the sun," and remarked to his mother: "No wonder Joseph Conrad could write fine books here."²⁸ Faulkner even named his sloop *The Ring Dove*, after one of the ships in "The End of the Tether."

Richard Adams decisively states: "In the whole of Faulkner's work, the influence of Conrad is the strongest and most persuasive." He was influenced by Conrad's muddled chronology (which also affected the narration of *Tender is the Night*), his lush descriptions of jungle wilderness, his contrast of light and dark imagery, his scenes of passion that occur near flowing streams, and his fictional characters and settings that recur in several works.²⁹ Stephen Ross shows that the impressionist techniques and moral insight of *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* had the strongest impact on *Absalom, Absalom!*.³⁰

Faulkner's 1950 Nobel Prize acceptance speech—which echoes not only the overblown diction but also the idea of man's triumph over entropy in Conrad's 1905 essay on Henry James—is his most blatant appropriation. In this speech, a notable example of a negative influence, Conradian rhetoric is transformed into Faulknerian bombast. Conrad wrote:

When the last aqueduct shall have crumbled to pieces, the last airship fallen to the ground, the last blade of grass have died upon a dying earth, man, indomitable by his training in resistance to misery and pain, shall set this undiminished light of his eyes against the feeble glow of the sun.³¹

And Faulkner repeated:

when the last ding-dong of doom has clanged and faded from the last worthless rock hanging tideless in the last red and dying evening, even then there will still be one more sound: that of his puny inexhaustible voice, still talking.³²

Conrad's influence, via Faulkner, on the teeming, thickly vegetated, formless, and overwritten Latin American novels of Gabriel García Márquez and Mario Vargas Llosa, is pervasive, though not always fortunate. Jorge Luis Borges, author of "Manuscrito Hallado en un Libro de Joseph Conrad" (a poem that has nothing to do with the writer), called Conrad "one of the greatest novelists and short story writers in the English language." *Nostromo* had a significant influence on his story "Guayaquil."³³ And Carlos Fuentes has recently expressed his great admiration for *Nostromo*.³⁴

Conrad's influence on postwar American writers, though not as powerful as on Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner, is still significant.

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Saul Bellow, adopting a rather fanciful analogy in *his* Nobel Prize speech, admired Conrad's rootlessness, exoticism, and cosmopolitanism:

Conrad appealed to me because he was like an American—he was an uprooted Pole sailing exotic seas, speaking French and writing English with extraordinary power and beauty. Nothing could be more natural to me, the child of immigrants who grew up in one of Chicago's immigrant neighborhoods than—of course!—a Slav who was a British sea captain and knew his way around Marseilles and wrote an Oriental sort of English.³⁵

James Dickey's *Deliverance* (1970) follows Conrad's plot and themes in its exploration of violence, self-testing, and inner discovery as a boat penetrates a wild, primitive, swampy Southern heart of darkness. Robert Stone, a major contemporary American writer, took the long epigraph to *Dog Soldiers* (1974) from *Heart of Darkness*. And his novel about violent revolution in Central America, *A Flag for Sunrise* (1981), was clearly influenced by *Nostromo*. In a recent *Paris Review* interview, Stone acknowledged his debt to Conrad. He praised Conrad's healthy skepticism and sense of political reality, which makes him seem like "one of us":

I'm beginning to frame [a theory of fiction]—and along rather Conradian lines. . . .

Conrad was a man of the world and a skeptic who worked not on the basis of ideology but of common sense. He saw things as they are without wanting to reduce them to theory. In that respect he's closer to the temper of our own time and certainly closer to my own ideas about reality and how to explore it in fiction.³⁶

Conrad's appeal to writers of our time is reflected in two books published in the last two years: Howard Norman's collection of stories, *Kiss in the Hotel Joseph Conrad* (1989), and the omnium-gatherum, heavily footnoted *Hermit of 69th Street* (1988) by Jerzy Kosinski, which has more than sixty allusions to his compatriot's life and works.

Orwell explains—more clearly than anyone else—why English novelists were attracted to Conrad. Responding to a question about Conrad's place and rank in English letters, published in a Polish émigré journal in April 1949, Orwell praised Conrad for his political insight and for putting English literature in touch with the European tradition:

I regard Conrad as one of the best writers of this century, and . . . one of the very few true novelists that England possesses. . . . [He had] a sort of grown-upness and political understanding which

would have been almost impossible to a native English writer at that time. . . . Conrad was one of those writers who in the present century civilized English literature and brought it back into contact with Europe.³⁷

Four months later, he told his publisher that he was planning a long chapter on Conrad for a new book of essays. But Orwell died in January 1950, before he could complete this project.

Like Conrad, Orwell spent his youth in the East. Conrad's descriptions of exotic Asian characters influenced Orwell's first novel, *Burmese Days* (1934), and his political ideas influenced Orwell's late works, *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). The Burmese judge U Po Kyin is clearly modeled on the physical characteristics of the Malay chief Doramin in *Lord Jim*. Both Orientals are lavishly dressed and enormously fat, both need assistance to rise from their chairs, and both habitually confer with their wives:

Doramin was one of the most remarkable men of his race I had ever seen. His bulk for a Malay was immense, but he did not look merely fat; he looked imposing, monumental. This motionless body [was] clad in rich stuffs, coloured silks, gold embroideries . . . the flat, big, round face [was] wrinkled, furrowed. . . . When he walked, two short, sturdy young fellows . . . sustained his elbows; they would ease him down and stand behind the chair until he wanted to rise . . . and then they would catch him under the armpits and help him up. . . . It was generally believed he consulted his wife as to public affairs.³⁸

Unblinking, rather like a great porcelain idol, U Po Kyin gazed out into the fierce sunlight. He was a man of fifty, so fat that for years he had not risen from his chair without help. . . . His face was vast, yellow and quite unwrinkled. . . . He wore one of those vivid Arakanese *longyi*s with green and magenta checks. . . . [His wife] had been the confidante of U Po Kyin's intrigues for twenty years and more.³⁹

Animal Farm, though radically different in style and form, has the same political theme and pessimistic ideology as *Nostromo*. Both novelists believe that the revolutionary, once in power, becomes as tyrannical as his oppressor. Orwell writes of post-revolutionary Animal Farm: "In the old days there had often been scenes of bloodshed equally terrible, but it seemed to all of them that it was far worse now that it was happening among themselves."⁴⁰ And Dr. Monyham, in one of the crucial thematic passages in *Nostromo*, condemns the unprincipled capitalist revolutionaries:

They have their law, and their justice. But it is founded on

expediency, and is inhuman; it is without rectitude, without the continuity and the force that can be found only in a moral principle. The time approaches when all that . . . [it] stands for shall weigh as heavily upon the people as the barbarism, cruelty, and misrule of a few years back.⁴¹

In *Under Western Eyes* Conrad expresses, with pessimistic perception, the theme of the revolution betrayed: "the unselfish and the unintelligent may begin a movement—but it passes away from them. They are not the leaders of a revolution. They are its victims: the victims of disgust, of disenchantment—often of remorse. Hopes grotesquely betrayed, ideals caricatured—that is the definition of revolutionary success."⁴² And in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Orwell develops, in a horrifying way, the inevitable corruption of revolutionary idealism and the bitter disappointment that occurs when the rebels replace the leaders they have destroyed.

The nature and extent of Conrad's influence on Ford is difficult to measure. He was intimately involved in Ford's personal and artistic life during the first decade of the century, when they collaborated on three unsuccessful novels: *The Inheritors* (1901), *Romance* (1903), and *The Nature of a Crime* (1906; published 1924). Their endless and fruitful aesthetic and technical discussions, which often lasted far into the night, certainly helped prepare Ford to write his masterpieces, *The Good Soldier* (1915) and *Parade's End* (1924–28). Ford's mistress Violet Hunt said that he "adored Conrad. I never heard him speak of Conrad without the most reverent affection. . . . [His attitude was] of almost cringing respect." Ford, acknowledging his debt, quite simply confirmed: "I learned all I know of Literature from Conrad."⁴³

After their bitter quarrel in 1909, Ford satirized Conrad as Simon Bransdon in *The Simple Life Limited* (1911), and also portrayed him as Macmaster in the opening pages of *Some Do Not* (1924). Thomas Moser calls Ford's *A Little Less than Gods* (1928) "his fictional farewell to Joseph Conrad" and writes that this novel "conscientiously follows *Suspense*, and makes explicit what Conrad only hints at in his fragment: that the heroine is the illegitimate daughter of the hero's father and hence the hero's half-sister."⁴⁴

Conrad helps to define a significant literary tradition that runs from Ford and Graham Greene (who edited Ford's works) to John le Carré, V. S. Naipaul, and Paul Theroux (an American, living in London, who has written a book on Naipaul). Greene mentions Conrad as an unconscious influence in his *Paris Review* interview (1953) and admits that his first three novels were influenced by Conrad. Kurtz and

Marlowe are characters in *The Name of Action* (1930). The Carlist War theme in *Arrow of Gold* influenced Greene's *Rumour at Nightfall* (1931). And the genre and themes of *The Secret Agent* were continued in Greene's *It's a Battlefield* (1934), *A Gun for Sale* (1936), and *The Confidential Agent* (1939).

Heart of Darkness, which is mentioned three times in *Journey without Maps* (1936) and clearly inspired his voyage to Africa, clarifies Greene's ambivalent attitude to civilization and his quest for primal memories. "Something had happened" to the three predecessors of the District Commissioner in Kailahun, just as it had to the predecessors of Marlow on the tin-pot steamboat. And the secretive innocence of the naive and ignorant German in beachcomber's dress, who "gave no indication of why he had come or why he was going or what he was doing in Africa at all," closely resembles Conrad's Russian in motley. Like Conrad, Greene draws analogies between the primitivism of the Africans and the ancient Britons: "in England too there was a time when men dressed as animals and danced."⁴⁵ And, like *Heart of Darkness*, *Journey without Maps* is both an exorcism and a journey into self.

Greene writes that "*Heart of Darkness* impressed Africa as an imaginative symbol on the European mind," and mentions Conrad five times in the first thirty-seven pages of *In Search of a Character* (1961). Greene notices how often Conrad compares the concrete to the abstract, and asks if he has caught the trick; and he writes:

Reading Conrad—the volume called *Youth* for the sake of *Heart of Darkness*—the first time since I abandoned him about 1932 because his influence on me was too great and too disastrous. The heavy hypnotic style falls around me again, and I am aware of the poverty of my own. Perhaps now I have lived long enough with my poverty to be safe from corruption. One day I will again read *Victory*.⁴⁶

But Greene was not quite safe from Conrad's influence, for in his African novel the tin-pot steamboat, the oppressive jungle, and the symbolic significance of the Congo are very like *Heart of Darkness*.

Though Conrad's novella was in Greene's thoughts when he was writing *A Burnt-Out Case* (1961), it is *Victory*, which Greene called one of the "great English novels of the last fifty years,"⁴⁷ that exerts the most powerful influence on Greene's novel. Greene follows Conrad's ironic plot rather precisely, for both novels concern the flight to a remote tropical retreat by a lonely man who attempts to extinguish all human emotions. Both heroes are nonbelievers who, on two related occasions, become unwilling subjects of a pernicious legend. Both are victims of an

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unsought love that forces them, against their principles, to become involved in the lives of others. As the outside world breaks into their isolation halfway through the novel, they meet their death and achieve their victory or cure. *A Burnt-Out Case*, so heavily indebted to *Victory*, is virtually a diluted and derivative version of the greater novel. After thirty years, Greene is still not “safe from corruption” by Conrad, whose influence is “too great and too disastrous.” Greene’s search for a character led him not only to the heart of darkness, but also to Conrad’s *Axel Heyst*.

The Secret Agent had an even stronger effect on John le Carré, who exclaimed: “I’m passionate about Conrad,”⁴⁸ than on Greene. The striking theme of *The Secret Agent*, which initiated the genre of the psychological-political espionage novel—the similar methods and morals of the criminals and the police—was restated in Le Carré’s first great success, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1964), when Control tells Leamas: “our methods—ours and those of the opposition—have become much the same.”⁴⁹ In *The Looking-Glass War* (1965), the agent Leiser, a Pole, “is not one of us.”⁵⁰ In *The Honourable Schoolboy* (1977), Westerby absorbs himself in Conrad during his journeys through Asia. Conrad’s theme of the double self or alter ego reappears in *Smiley’s People* (1980) when Smiley “began plodding through the long galleries of his professional memory . . . looking for one hallowed face that, like a secret sharer, seemed to have swum out of the little contact photograph to board his faltering consciousness.”⁵¹ And *The Little Drummer Girl* (1983), like Greene’s *The Name of Action*, uses Conradian names. The heroine Charlie and the Israeli agents—Kurtz and Joseph—who control her, are named after the two main characters and the author of *Heart of Darkness*.⁵²

In V. S. Naipaul’s early novel *The Mimic Men* (1967), Eden, a West Indian Negro, has fantasies of omnipotence inspired by Kurtz’s Africa and Lord Jim’s Patusan: “Eden had fixed on Asia as the continent he wished to travel in; he had been stirred by *Lord Jim*. His deepest wish was for the Negro race to be abolished; his intermediate dream was of a remote land where he, the solitary Negro among an alien pretty people, ruled as a sort of sexual king. *Lord Jim*, *Lord Eden*.” Naipaul also introduces some biography by making Conrad’s actual friend Hugh Clifford, a writer and eminent colonial administrator in Malaya and Nigeria, governor of the imaginary island of Isabella: “he spent much of his time in Government House writing a book of Malayan memories called *Coast and Kampong* which, after an unfavourable review by Joseph Conrad, committed him to the further literary exercise of a lengthy

literary correspondence ripening to friendship, with the as yet little known novelist.”⁵³ And, as Paul Theroux points out, Singh’s writing in *The Mimic Men* “is startlingly similar in certain details and emotions to the incident retold in *A Personal Record* of Joseph Conrad’s first attempt at writing, at the age of thirty-two, in a London boarding house.”⁵⁴ Singh relates:

It was with a delicious sense of anxiety and of being employed again that I got the hotel to give me a writing-table, set it beside the window, and composed myself to work. It was just after breakfast. The pleasant middle-aged Irish chambermaid had got my room ready early and was going to bring me coffee at eleven. My mouth felt clean; my arms were strained and tingling with excitement.⁵⁵

In “Conrad’s Darkness,” Naipaul confirms Conrad’s influence on his work. Quoting *Nostromo*, he praises Conrad (as Stone and Orwell had done) for his contemporaneity and for his political insight, especially about the radical limitations of third-world countries, which Naipaul has also anatomized:

I found that Conrad—sixty years before, in the time of a great peace—had been everywhere before me. Not as a man with a cause, but a man offering, as in *Nostromo*, a vision of the world’s half-made societies as places which continuously made and unmade themselves, where there was no goal, and where always “something inherent in the necessities of successful action . . . carried with it the moral degradation of the idea.”⁵⁶

Naipaul’s great novel about the ghastly politics, the chaos, and the cruelty of the independent Congo, *A Bend in the River* (1979), is deeply indebted to Conrad. And its title comes from *Lord Jim*.⁵⁷

The seminal *Secret Agent* had as strong an impact on Theroux as on Greene and Le Carré. Like Conrad’s novel, Theroux’s *The Family Arsenal* (1976) portrays the morally squalid London underworld of revolutionary bomb-throwers, who merge at times with a cross section of corrupt upper-class society. But the impact of *Lord Jim* on Theroux’s best novel, *Saint Jack* (1976), is even more significant. Like *Lord Jim*, *Saint Jack* (the titles are equally paradoxical) is a white man who has lost his social and professional status and lives on the fringe of a lonely, alien world in Singapore (the setting of “The End of the Tether” and “The Shadow-Line”). Theroux emphasizes the themes of disillusion and decay in his description of the seedy port city: “There was something final in the decline, an air of ramshackle permanency common in Eastern ports, as if having fallen so far they would fall no further.”⁵⁸

Jack, who had been charged with possession of drugs during a

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police raid in the United States, jumped bail (as Jim jumped ship) and became a sailor in the Indian Ocean. An immoral but fundamentally decent character, Jack seeks moral redemption and sacrifices himself for salvation. For low pay, but in return for a work permit that allows him to remain in Singapore, he toils as a water-clerk (Jim's job) and, through his contacts with European ships, brings trade to the Chinese chandler. Captain Brierly's suicide in *Lord Jim* is reflected at the end of part I of Theroux's novel when William Leigh, the accountant who has come from Hong Kong to examine the company's books, suddenly dies of a heart attack. The apparently ironic title of the novel contrasts the conventional idea of sin to a more idiosyncratic but equally valid morality. The novel reveals goodness beneath evil (Jack's entrepreneurial whorehouses are the equivalent of Jim's adventures in Patusan), describes a religious quest, portrays the salvation of a sinner, and—despite his vices—suggests the possibility of achieving grace.

There are also minor but significant references to Conrad in the works of English novelists outside the Conradian tradition I have defined. Saki's "The Unrest-Cure" in *Chronicles of Clovis* (1911) is—like Max Beerbohm's parody of Conrad's "The Lagoon" in *A Christmas Garland* (1912)—a satiric response to Conrad's first collection of stories, *Tales of Unrest*. Clovis tells the hero-victim of the story: "You've heard of Rest-cures for people who've broken down under stress of too much worry and strenuous living; well, you're suffering from overmuch repose and placidity, and you need the opposite kind of treatment."⁵⁹ Clovis then proceeds to bombard him with a series of imaginary difficulties in order to jolt him out of his comatose complacency.

Somerset Maugham's *Ashenden: or The British Agent* (1928) followed the realistic espionage genre that had begun with *The Secret Agent* in 1907. Maugham traveled to exotic locales—which Conrad had sailed to in the course of his maritime career—in search of fictional material. And he paid tribute to Conrad in his story "Neil MacAdam" (1933), when one of the characters defends Conrad by asserting: "I don't think it's a mean achievement to have created a country, a dark, sinister, romantic and heroic country of the soul."⁶⁰

The Informer (1925) by Liam O'Flaherty, who published a pamphlet on Conrad in 1930, shows the influence of *Under Western Eyes*. In Conrad's novel, Razumov is punished by Russian revolutionaries in Geneva after confessing that he had betrayed Victor Haldin in Saint Petersburg. O'Flaherty's novel also concerns an informer who is hunted by the shadowy executioners of an Irish revolutionary organization. Two characters dominate the tragedy of betrayal and retribution: Gypo

Nolan, the hulking giant who, under stress of poverty, discloses the whereabouts of the wanted Frankie McPhilip; and Dan Gallagher, the egotistical commandant of the militant organization that has sworn to hunt down and kill the unknown informer. The fine, underrated writer Francis King also pays tribute to Conrad's Genevan novel in his latest work, *Punishments* (1989), when a character exclaims: "Conrad! Well, fancy that! *Under Western Eyes*. Far greater than any novel Dostoevsky ever wrote."⁶¹

Joyce Cary was, like Conrad, a man of action: a soldier in the Balkans and the Cameroons, and a colonial administrator in Northern Nigeria. He acknowledged Conrad as one of his masters. The name of the eponymous heroine in Cary's African novel *Aissa Saved* (1932) is taken from the wild Aissa in *An Outcast of the Islands*, who fatally attracts Willems and is finally shot by him. In Cary's novel, the equally destructive Fulani girl Aissa, a primitive bush pagan, is also torn between two worlds. A new and ardent convert to Christianity, she is branded as a witch by enemies who still believe in ju-ju. As rioting breaks out between Christians and pagans, Aissa allows her foot to be cut off to rid herself of demons. Divided by secular and spiritual love, she sacrifices her beloved baby in a last mad moment of violent ecstasy.

One of the best—and uncharacteristically comic—scenes in Conrad's first novel, *Almayer's Folly*, inspired the bizarre, black-comic conclusion of Evelyn Waugh's *A Handful of Dust* (1934), whose title (as we have seen) came from Conrad through Eliot. After Lakamba, the Malay rajah, tells his adviser, Babalatchi, that he must poison Almayer to prevent him from revealing to the Dutch the secret of the gold, Lakamba demands music. And Babalatchi must, reluctantly and incongruously, provide it. Nearly falling asleep while he mechanically turns the hand-organ, Babalatchi fills the unresponsive jungle with alien yet soothing sounds. As Lakamba dozes comfortably in his armchair, and the music plays, Manrico, captured in battle and about to be beheaded, sings his farewell to life and to Leonora in the last act of Verdi's *Il Trovatore*. Waugh brilliantly transforms this scene when the weary Tony Last, captured by the bored Mr. Todd, is forced to read Dickens endlessly in the remote regions of the Amazon jungle.

The British Guianan novelist Wilson Harris, who has written an interesting essay on Conrad, used him in his first major novel, *The Palace of the Peacock* (1960). Ian Watt points out that, like *Heart of Darkness*, "it deals with a journey up a river, which eventuates in a more or less transcendental discovery, a symbolic 'dance of all fulfillment'."⁶²

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Thomas Mann, a great admirer of Conrad, wrote a perceptive essay on *The Secret Agent* in 1926, which helped to strengthen Conrad's reputation in Germany. The self-effacing, pedantic tone of the deliberately imperceptive narrator of Mann's *Doctor Faustus* (1947), Serenus Zeitblom, is taken directly from the professor of languages who narrates *Under Western Eyes* but confesses: "I have no comprehension of the Russian character."⁶³ Conrad's novel opens:

To begin with I wish to disclaim the possession of those high gifts of imagination and expression which would have enabled my pen to create for the reader the personality of the man who called himself, after the Russian custom, Cyril son of Isidor.⁶⁴

And Mann clearly imitates this narrative mode in the opening paragraph of *Doctor Faustus*:

I wish to state quite definitely that it is by no means out of any wish to bring my own personality into the foreground that I preface with a few words about myself and my own affairs this report on the life of the departed Adrian Leverkühn. . . . My mind misgives me that I shall only be awakening the reader's doubt whether he is in the right hands: whether, I mean, my whole existence does not disqualify me for the task dictated by my heart rather than by any true competence for the work.⁶⁵

Thirteen years after Mann's novel, the younger German novelist Siegfried Lenz retold (as did Graham Greene) the story of *Victory*. In *The Light-Ship* (1960), the floating beacon is taken over by gangsters, who hold up the crew and in the end kill the captain. The essence of the novella is the tension between the generations, for the captain's son becomes reconciled with his father only when his parent is mortally wounded. The novella, like *Victory*, portrays the themes of guilt, duty, and humanity.

Conrad's influence on French literature is more pervasive than on German. The French diplomat and poet St.-John Perse visited Conrad in the summer of 1912, and in February 1921 he recollected their meeting in a letter written from Peking: "I too have lost nothing of what I carried away with me from your home—such as the fragments of our first intimate conversations in the evening, in your small study downstairs."⁶⁶ St.-John Perse later defined his literary lineage in relation to Conrad: "[My] descent is from Conrad and W. H. Hudson: poetry, but not 'literature.'"⁶⁷

André Gide, a much closer friend of Conrad, took the epigraph to part V of *Lafcadio's Adventures* (1914) from *Lord Jim*: "There is only one remedy! Only one thing alone can cure us from being ourselves!" . . .

'Yes; strictly speaking, the question is not how to get cured, but how to live.'⁶⁸ Gide's crucial concept of the *acte gratuit* (symbolized by Lafcadio pushing an unknown and innocent passenger out of a moving train) comes from Conrad's "the shocking senselessness of gratuitous blasphemy" (the attempt to blow up the Greenwich Observatory) in *The Secret Agent*.⁶⁹ Gide dedicated his *Travels in the Congo* (1927) "To the Memory of Joseph Conrad" and adopted Conrad's anti-imperialist theme. In this book, he admires the art of *Typhoon* (which he had translated into French), and confirms—on the spot—the greatness and impact of Conrad's African book: "I am re-reading *Heart of Darkness* for the fourth time. It is only after having seen the country that I realize how good it is."⁷⁰

Louis-Ferdinand Céline's version of his African journey, as Frederick Karl notes, owes a great deal to *Heart of Darkness*, and stresses the same sense of reflected madness in an alien and chromatic tropical world. Céline observes:

It is hard to take a reasonable view of people and things in the tropics because of the aura of colour which envelops them. Things and colours are in a haze. A little sardine tin lying open at noon in the middle of the road throws off so many different reflections that in one's eyes it takes on the importance of an accident. You've got to be careful. It's not only the human beings who are hysterical down in those parts; things get involved in it too.⁷¹

Conrad appealed to the French Resistance as well as to collaborators, like Céline, on the opposite side of the political spectrum. Speaking of Vercors' Resistance novella, *Les Armes de la nuit* (1947), Jan Szczepanski, the Polish Resistance fighter, remarks that the author "was indeed so much under Conrad's influence that he regarded his sensibilities and language as best suited to depict the situations at hand."⁷²

The aviator Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, and the adventurer and Resistance leader André Malraux, were both powerfully affected by Conrad's emphasis on action and responsibility, by his ideas of fraternal solitude and human solidarity—"the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts."⁷³

Clara Malraux, André's first wife, compares their riverine penetration of Cambodia to Conrad's self-exploration in the Congo: "My daydreaming remembered (or did it foresee?) *Heart of Darkness*: we too were going to push up the river and go back into ourselves."⁷⁴ Malraux's fascinating, undervalued novel, *The Royal Way* (1930), which portrays the search for Khmer sculpture in the jungle, is based on his

experiences in Cambodia and strongly influenced by the dark fate of Kurtz. After finding the sculpture, the hero Perken penetrates deeper into the jungle to search for Grabot. He is an adventurer, rumored to dominate the remote and primitive tribes, who has disappeared among the Mois. Perken finds that Grabot, far from being a powerful chief, has been captured and tortured by the natives he had intended to conquer. He is now a blinded slave, forced to walk on a treadmill. Perken (Marlow) rescues Grabot (Kurtz); but he, not Grabot, dies from a septic wound on the journey back.

The Walnut Trees of Altenburg (1943), like *Heart of Darkness*, is narrated through a circular frame story. And there are close stylistic affinities between Conrad's famous description of the overwhelming prehistoric jungle that reduces man to an insignificant insect and Malraux's evocation of the African wilderness that also seems to nullify man:

On we went again into the silence, along empty reaches, round the still bends, between the high walls of our winding way, reverberating in hollow claps the ponderous beat of the stern wheel. Trees, trees, millions of trees, massive, immense, running up high; and at their foot, hugging the bank against the stream, crept the little begrimed steamboat, like a sluggish beetle crawling on the floor of a lofty portico. It made you feel very small, very lost.⁷⁵

The endless succession of days under the dusty firmament of Libya or the heavy leaden sky of the Congo, the tracks of invisible animals converging on the water points, the exodus of starving dogs under the empty sky, the time of day when every thought becomes a blank, the giant trees gloomily soaring up in the prehistoric void.⁷⁶

Conrad's works influenced the leaders of the Polish as well as of the French Resistance, and it is significant that the most vital Polish political movement in modern times is called "Solidarity." Najder, a Polish critic, writes that "in his motherland he became not only one of the most popular authors of fiction translated from a foreign language but also a very influential writer, one of the most powerful and deeply felt voices in modern Polish literature . . . [and] one of the chief moral authorities for the young members of the Polish resistance."⁷⁷ This admiration of Conrad's code of behavior, moral strength, and of his ability to create a "heroic country of the soul" is confirmed by Jan Szczepanski, who poignantly observes in "The Conrad of My Generation" (1957)⁷⁸: "For us Conrad was more topical than ever before. His books became a

collection of practical recipes for men fighting lonely battles in the dark."⁷⁹

¹ For a similar study, see Jeffrey Meyers, *The Legacy of D. H. Lawrence* (London: Macmillan, 1987).

² Zdzislaw Najder, *Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle*, trans. Halina Carroll-Najder (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983), p. 492.

³ T. S. Eliot, "Swinburne as Poet," *Selected Essays, 1917–1932* (New York: Harcourt, 1932), p. 285.

⁴ Joseph Conrad, *Youth*, Kent Edition, 26 volumes (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1926), 16:37.

⁵ Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, 13:177.

⁶ Leonard Unger, "Laforgue, Conrad, and Eliot," *T. S. Eliot: Moments and Patterns* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1966), p. 113. Robert Secor and Debra Moddlemog, who have gathered useful bibliographical information on Eliot, O'Neill, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner, write in *Joseph Conrad and American Writers: A Bibliographical Study of Affinities, Influences and Relations* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1985), p. 113: "sources have been found for Eliot's poetry, plays and essays in over a dozen different works by Conrad."

For a discussion of Conrad's influence on another American poet, see Harry Gilonis, "Dark Heart: Conrad in Louis Zukofsky's *A*," *Conradian* (London), 14 (1989), 92–101.

⁷ Travis Bogard, *Contour in Time: The Plays of Eugene O'Neill* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972), p. 39. See also pp. 24, 38–42, 93–94, 135.

⁸ Quoted in Roman Dyboski, "My Encounter with Conrad" (1932), in *Conrad under Familial Eyes*, ed. Zdzislaw Najder, trans. Halina Carroll-Najder (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983), p. 264.

⁹ Ernest Hemingway, "Conrad Supplement. III," *Transatlantic Review*, 2 (1924), 341–42.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ E. M. Forster employs this phrase, with irony, when Mr. Turton says of Ronny in *A Passage to India* (New York: Harcourt, 1924), p. 25: "Heaslop's a sahib; he's the type we want, he's one of us." Robert Lowell also uses this phrase, ironically, to describe Mussolini, in "Beyond the Alps," *Life Studies* (1959; New York: Farrar, 1967), p. 3: "He was one of us / only, pure prose." The poem, about his loss of religious faith, contrasts poet and ruler, Christian and Pagan, Duce and Caesar.

¹² Joseph Conrad, *Victory*, 15:187.

¹³ Joseph Conrad, *Within the Tides*, 10:viii.

¹⁴ Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon* (New York: Scribner's, 1932), p. 2.

¹⁵ Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, 23:xiv.

¹⁶ By-Line: Ernest Hemingway, ed. William White (New York: Scribner's, 1967), p. 219.

¹⁷ Joseph Conrad, *The Rover*, 24:17.

¹⁸ Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (New York: Scribner's, 1954), p. 108.

¹⁹ Ernest Hemingway, *Selected Letters, 1917–1961*, ed. Carlos Baker (New York: Scribner's, 1981), p. 557. The French phrase appears in Ford Madox Ford, *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance* (London: Duckworth, 1924), p. 113.

²⁰ F. Scott Fitzgerald, "10 Best Books I Have Read," *Jersey City Evening Journal*, 24 Apr. 1923, p. 9.

²¹ Quoted in "Fitzgerald on Joseph Conrad," *Fitzgerald Newsletter*, ed. Matthew Bruccoli (Washington, D.C.: NCR Microcards Editions Books, 1969), pp. 313–14 (May 19, 1920).

²² F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Letters*, ed. Andrew Turnbull (1963; London: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 501. This letter responds to H. L. Mencken's review "The Heirs of Conrad" in the *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, 24 May 1925, and suggests that Conrad also influenced Joseph Hergesheimer's *Java Head* (New York: Knopf, 1919) and *The Bright Shawl* (New York: Knopf, 1922) as well as Somerset Maugham's novel about Gauguin, *The Moon and Sixpence* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1919). See Robert Stallman, "Conrad and *The Great Gatsby*," *Twentieth Century Literature*, 1 (1955), 5–12; James Miller, *F. Scott Fitzgerald: His Art and His Technique* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 92–94, 111–13, 121–22; and Robert Emmet Long, "The Great Gatsby and the Tradition of Joseph Conrad," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 8 (1966), 257–76, 407–22.

²³ Fitzgerald, *Letters*, pp. 383–84.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 329.

²⁵ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 16:xi.

²⁶ Faulkner in the University, ed. Frederick Gwynn and Joseph Blotner (1959; New York: Vintage, 1965), p. 20. See also pp. 50, 150.

²⁷ *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner, 1926–1962*, ed. James Meriwether and Michael Millgate (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 21.

²⁸ William Faulkner, *Selected Letters*, ed. Joseph Blotner (New York: Vintage, 1977), p. 30.

²⁹ Richard Adams, "The Apprenticeship of William Faulkner," *Tulane Studies in English*, 12 (1962), 129–35.

³⁰ See Stephen Ross, "Conrad's Influence on *Absalom, Absalom!*," *Studies in American Fiction*, 2 (1974), 199–209.

³¹ Joseph Conrad, *Notes on Life and Letters*, 3:13.

³² Quoted in Adams, "The Apprenticeship of William Faulkner," p. 135, which noted the source of the Nobel Prize speech five years before Eric Solomon, "Joseph Conrad, William Faulkner, and the Nobel Prize Speech," *Notes and Queries*, 14 (June 1967), 247–48.

³³ Jorge Luis Borges, "Manuscrito Hallado en un Libro de Joseph Conrad," *Poemas, 1923–1958* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1958), p. 86; and Jorge Luis Borges, *Introduction to English Literature*, trans. Clark Keating and Robert Evans (1965; Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1974), p. 60. See Jorge Luis Borges, "Guayaquil," *Doctor Brodie's Report*, trans. Norman Thomas (New York: Dutton, 1972), pp. 99–107.

³⁴ Carlos Fuentes, conversation with Jeffrey Meyers, Boulder, Colorado, Sept. 18, 1989.

³⁵ Saul Bellow, "The Nobel Lecture," *American Scholar*, 46 (1977), 316. Bellow's African novel, *Henderson the Rain King* (New York: Viking, 1959), may

have been influenced by *Heart of Darkness* as well as by his readings in anthropology.

³⁶ Robert Stone, *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews*, 8th ser., ed. George Plimpton (New York: Viking, 1988), pp. 364, 366.

³⁷ George Orwell, "Conrad's Place and Rank in English Letters," *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters*, ed. Ian Angus and Sonia Orwell (New York: Harcourt, 1968), 4:489.

³⁸ Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, 2:259.

³⁹ George Orwell, *Burmese Days* (1934; London: Penguin Books, 1967), p. 5, 14. In *Lord Jim*, 2:239, the captain of the ship that takes Jim to Patusan says that a certain man "was many times falser than the 'weapons of a crocodile.'" In *Burmese Days*, p. 43, Veraswami tells Flory that U Po Kyin "hass [sic] the cunning of a crocodile, its cruelty, its bestiality."

⁴⁰ George Orwell, *Animal Farm* (New York: Harcourt, 1946), p. 72.

⁴¹ Joseph Conrad, *Nostromo*, 9:511.

⁴² Joseph Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, 2:134–35.

⁴³ Violet Hunt, *I Have This to Say* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1926), pp. 38, 32; Ford Madox Ford, *Letters*, ed. Richard Ludwig (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1965), p. 127.

⁴⁴ Thomas Moser, *The Life in the Fiction of Ford Madox Ford* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), pp. 255–56.

⁴⁵ Graham Greene, *Journey without Maps* (New York: Viking, 1961), pp. 66, 109.

⁴⁶ Graham Greene, "Fiction," *Spectator*, 10 Feb. 1933, p. 194; Graham Greene, *In Search of a Character* (New York: Viking, 1961), p. 31.

⁴⁷ Graham Greene, "Remembering Mr. Jones," *The Lost Childhood and Other Essays* (1951; New York: Viking, 1962), p. 99.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Miriam Gross, "The Secret World of John le Carré," *Observer*, 3 Feb. 1980, p. 35.

⁴⁹ John le Carré, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (New York: Bantam Books, 1983), p. 15.

⁵⁰ John le Carré, *The Looking-Glass War* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), p. 137.

⁵¹ John le Carré, *Smiley's People* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), p. 151.

⁵² See David Monaghan, *The Novels of John le Carré* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), pp. 74–86.

⁵³ V. S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* (New York: Vintage, 1985), pp. 151, 138. The actual title of Clifford's book is *In Court and Kampong* (London: Grant Richards, 1897). Conrad reviewed Clifford's *Studies in Brown Humanity* (London: Grant Richards, 1898); Clifford reviewed *Youth* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1902). See Harry Gailey, *Clifford: Imperial Proconsul* (London: Rex Collings, 1982).

⁵⁴ Naipaul, *The Mimic Men*, pp. 242–43. See Joseph Conrad, *A Personal Record*, 6:69–70.

⁵⁵ Paul Theroux, *V. S. Naipaul* (London: André Deutsch, 1972), p. 28.

⁵⁶ V. S. Naipaul, "Conrad's Darkness," *The Return of Eva Peron* (London: André Deutsch, 1980), p. 216. See Conrad, *Nostromo*, 9:521.

⁵⁷ See Conrad, *Lord Jim*, 21:330.

⁵⁸ Paul Theroux, *Saint Jack* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1976), p. 19.

⁵⁹ [H. H. Munro], *The Best of Saki*, ed. and introd. by Graham Greene (New York: Viking, 1970), p. 46.

⁶⁰ W. Somerset Maugham, "Neil MacAdam," *Complete Short Stories* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1967), 4:1601.

⁶¹ Francis King, *Punishments* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1989), p. 19.

⁶² Ian Watt, *Joseph Conrad: "Nostromo"* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988), p. 90. See Wilson Harris, "The Frontier on Which *Heart of Darkness* Stands," *Research in African Literature*, 12 (1981), 86–93.

⁶³ Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, 22:4.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 22:3.

⁶⁵ Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Knopf, 1948), p. 3.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Najder, *Joseph Conrad*, p. 379.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Kathleen Raine, "St.-John Perse's Birds," *Southern Review*, 3 (1967), 257.

⁶⁸ Conrad, *Lord Jim*, 2:212.

⁶⁹ Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, 13:33.

⁷⁰ André Gide, *Travels in the Congo*, trans. Dorothy Bussy (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1962), pp. 292–93.

⁷¹ See Frederick Karl, *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives* (London: Faber, 1979), p. 285n, quoting Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *Journey to the End of the Night*, trans. John Marks (1934; New York: New Directions, 1960), p. 124.

⁷² Jan Szczepanski, "The Conrad of My Generation" (1957), in Najder, *Conrad under Familial Eyes*, p. 280. Vercors is the pseudonym of Jean Bruller (b.1902).

⁷³ Conrad, *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, 23:xii.

⁷⁴ Clara Malraux, *Memoirs*, trans. Patrick O'Brien (New York: Farrar, 1967), p. 246.

⁷⁵ Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 16:95.

⁷⁶ André Malraux, *The Walnut Trees of Altenburg*, trans. A. W. Fielding (London: John Lehmann, 1952), p. 113.

⁷⁷ Najder, Introd. to *Conrad under Familial Eyes*, p. xxi.

⁷⁸ Jan Szczepanski, in Najder, *Conrad under Familial Eyes*, p. 279.

⁷⁹ Conrad also influenced a vast audience through the sixteen films that were inspired by his works: *Victory* (1919); *Lord Jim* (1925); *The Silver Treasure* (based on *Nostromo*, 1926); *The Road to Romance* (based on *Romance*, 1927); *The Rescue* (1929); *Dangerous Paradise* (based on *Victory*, 1930); *The Woman Alone* (based on *The Secret Agent*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock, with Oscar Homolka and Sylvia Sidney as the Verlocs, 1936); *Razumov* (based on *Under Western Eyes*, directed by Marc Allegret, with Jean-Louis Barrault as Haldin, 1937); *Victory* (with Cedric Hardwicke as Jones, Frederic March as Heyst, and Betty Field as Lena, 1941); *An Outcast of the Islands* (the best Conrad film, directed by Carol Reed, with Trevor Howard, Robert Morley, and Wendy Hiller, 1951); *Face to Face* (based on "The Secret Sharer," with James Mason, 1952); *Laughing Anne* (1954); *Lord Jim* (1964); *The Rover* (1967); *The Duellists* (based on "The Duel," 1977); and *Apocalypse Now* (based on *Heart of Darkness*, 1979). David Lean is now directing and Robert Bolt writing the screenplay for *Nostromo*.

Synge's *Riders to the Sea*: Island as Cultural Battleground

JUDITH REMY LEDER

John Millington Synge had a tendency to romanticize Irish peasant life: in *The Aran Islands*, for example, Synge presented the islanders as naive and charming primitives whose lives, while not Edenic, were largely and happily unspoiled by contact with the modern world. Most critical opinion of the last eighty-five years has at least tacitly accepted this image of Synge's peasants.¹ A criticism informed by contemporary anthropological insights suggests, however, that Rousseauian assessments sell short the plays of Synge and miss much of their richness. If we read the plays admitting the possibility that Synge's characters are neither naive nor uncomplicated, we see that his dramatic presentation of the peasants differs remarkably from his primitivist notions about them. Synge never allowed his "theories" to dominate his creative vision. As a result, he gave us not romanticized peasants untouched by modernity, but rather individuals fractured by modernity, peasants caught up in the major cultural transition of the modern age: the transition from a folk to an urban consciousness.

What are the marks of that transition? Anthropologists tell us that groups in transition inevitably experience shifts in philosophy, custom, and physical orientation. Transitional communities are not homogeneous; rather, their members are found at every point along the cultural continuum.² The traditional members manifest certainty about their own worldview, a reverence for custom, and an awareness of the radical limitations of the material world. The modern members of the group are philosophically relativistic, are willing to alter the old ways, and think of themselves as part of the world rather than part of an island in the world. Those caught in the middle, the "transitionals," are

almost schizophrenic: drawn in opposite directions by forces of great power, they are culturally double-bound. In *Riders to the Sea*, Synge presents us with what is virtually a textbook case of a folk culture in transition, for the play deals not only with Maurya's grief about the loss of her sons but also with the conflict between two worldviews—hers and that of the "big world"—a conflict that Yeats, in a different context, said would lead to the "passing of all beauty and strength."³

At the folk end of the cultural continuum in *Riders* is Maurya, a traditional island woman with rural interests and convictions; the conflict between her and all the other characters in the play is pervasive and constant. She differs from them first in the limits of her physical world. Maurya's focus is on "this place," the island. She knows it intimately—its winds, its graves, its portents. She knows the amount of turf necessary to keep a fire alive, and the way a drowned son will look when he has been floating on the sea for nine days; she knows the long history of her own family—mostly a litany of death. Her knowledge is deep, but sharply limited to the island. In fact, during the course of the play, Maurya's world becomes progressively more constricted. Early in the dialogue, Cathleen alludes to the fact that her mother keeps vigil for Michael, the missing son, by going down to the shore when the tide is out. By the midpoint of the play, however, just after Bartley has left, age and fragility seem to catch up with Maurya, for, when Cathleen suggests that Maurya make the short walk to the stone well, the old woman comments, "It's hard set I am to walk."⁴ Her world, already limited to the island, is narrowing to the cottage. From the perspective of this narrow world, the mainland is a hostile place.

Like her physical orientation, Maurya's attitude toward the customs of the island is also traditional. She seems acutely aware that the order of island life is being irrevocably altered; much of what she says reflects her concern about the erosion of custom and tradition on the island. She sees a son willing to leave the cottage before he has done the proper honor to his brother: "It's a hard thing they'll be saying below if the body is washed up and there's no man in it to make the coffin" (p. 9). She is frustrated by the circumstances that force women to take on the tasks of men: "How would the like of [Cathleen] get a good price for a pig?" (p. 9). She hints, moreover, that there is an erosion of the most basic tradition of the island: the valuing of person over profit. Bartley's willingness to risk his life for a small gain gives evidence that his presuppositions about the right way to act are quite different from Maurya's.

Conrad Arensberg and Solon Kimball, in their seminal study of the

folk society of Ireland, talk at some length about the respect that traditional Irish society gives the elderly.⁵ Initially, it appears that this custom is honored in *Riders*, for Maurya's children protect her, fear her authority and anger, and worry about her response to the news of Michael's death. Thus, Maurya seems a power in her own house: Demeter-like, she weeps for her dead children and dominates her living ones. But the picture is not entirely traditional. The customary reverence owed to the rural matriarch is being undermined. Although her children are generally polite to her, and see her as one in whom tradition and precedent are preserved, their modern attitudes offer a challenge to her position. Cathleen, the older daughter, who is as quick-tempered and sharp-tongued as her mother, often contradicts the old woman, while Nora and Bartley, seemingly more deferential, covertly resist her. Bartley simply refuses to deal with his mother's comments or requests, sidestepping questions that make him uneasy, and Nora avoids even the most elementary conversation with her mother.

Despite this resistance, Maurya persists in her beliefs. She has the traditional propensity to extrapolate from an apparently simple event to a philosophical principle. In this way, she is quite different from her daughters; the following interchange illustrates the difference quite clearly:

MAURYA: It's hard set I am to walk.

CATHLEEN: Give her the stick (*looking at her anxiously*) Nora, or maybe she'll slip on the big stones.

NORA: What stick?

CATHLEEN: The stick Michael brought from Connemara.

MAURYA: (*Taking the stick Nora gives her*) In the big world the old people do be leaving things after them for their sons and young children, but in this place it is the young men do be leaving things for them that do be old. (p. 13)

Always practical, Cathleen wants everything to go smoothly and sensibly. Although she is worried about her mother, she knows just how to deal with the old woman's frailty. Quick-witted and well able to suit solution to immediate need, Cathleen is mistress of the house. A natural storyteller, she provides local detail about this particular stick in this particular cottage. Nora, however, neither sees her mother's need nor is able to make clear sense of the things in the cottage. For Nora, the stick is simply part of the cottage paraphernalia, an unspecified object that she cannot even locate on her own. Maurya's perception differs markedly from that of both her daughters. Like Cathleen, Maurya

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knows the history of the things in the cottage—the stick, the new rope, the turf, the black pig, and the white boards. But Maurya does not have Cathleen's mundane view of ordinary things. For Maurya, the traditional woman, things point beyond themselves and are invested with ultimate meaning. The stick is not simply the one Michael brought from Connemara; it is a sign that the order of reality on the island is topsyturvy. Something is disordered; the proper structure of society has been frustrated. Because the young people of the island have begun to follow the ways of the "big world" (ways that are not suited to the island), the old inherit from the young. Maurya's attempt to convince Bartley to stay on the island is couched in traditional language and predicated on traditional beliefs. No sooner has Bartley come into the cottage than Maurya says:

You'd do right to leave that rope, Bartley, hanging by the boards (*Bartley takes the rope*). It will be wanting in this place, I'm telling you, if Michael is washed up tomorrow morning or the next morning or any morning in the week, for it's a deep grave we'll make him by the grace of God. (p. 9)

This is Maurya's first sally in what she knows to be a duel to save Bartley's life. Maurya believes that it is not fitting for Bartley to leave the island. Her appeal is to custom, which demands both that Bartley wait until his brother's body is washed ashore and that he dig a deep grave for the dead man. But Bartley is not interested in custom. Practicality and logic, rather than custom, are the bases for his decision: he says, "I must go now quickly. This is the one boat going for two weeks or beyond it, and the fair will be a good fair for horses, I heard them saying below" (p. 9).

Since Maurya's appeal to custom fails, she tries a slightly different approach: "It's a hard thing they'll be saying below if the body is washed up and there's no man in it to make the coffin" (p. 9). She does not contradict Bartley or argue with his account of the talk "below," she simply points out that he may have missed what the villagers implied. If he takes their advice but, as a result, fails to perform his duty to bury his brother, the islanders will not congratulate but rebuke him. Bartley, however, is inured to this argument as well. He chooses the logical, the practical, the modern route, thereby ignoring both custom and the subtleties of island talk. After nine days' wait, Bartley judges it is unlikely that Michael's body will be washed ashore. He is convinced that it is pointless to wait any longer: "How would [Michael's body] be washed up, and we after looking each day for nine days and a strong wind blowing a while back from the west and the south?" (p. 9).

Maurya's response to this is the central point of her argument. Although she is willing to give a little on the matter of traditional responsibility and custom, she presents two imperative reasons for Bartley to stay on the island. First, he should not go against the signs: "If [the body] isn't found itself, that wind is raising the sea, and there was a star up against the moon, and it rising at night" (p. 9). The star-dogged moon, called "hurlbassy" by Irish and English sailors, portended tempests.⁶ As a man of the island, Bartley should know the weight of such a sign, and he should never ignore it. A more compelling reason, however, is a philosophical one—Bartley should hold life dearer than profit, or risk, or adventure, or action: "If it was a hundred horses or a thousand horses you had itself, what is the price of a thousand horses against a son where there is one son only" (p. 9).⁷ Maurya appeals to Bartley to put patience in the place of action, faith in the place of logic, and intuition in the place of reason; she is asking Bartley to think like a traditional man. But Bartley is not a traditional man; though he pauses at the door for Maurya's blessing, he is firm enough of purpose to depart without it.

Throughout this battle for Bartley's life, Maurya employs rhetoric characteristic of the oral tradition—a tradition that had lived much longer among the Celts than among other European populations. Maurya, heir to this tradition, wields words in a way no "modern" woman can. Her language is not easily dismissed. It has shape and surface; it is "hard" and "dark" and, as Maurya hints, should have the power to "hold." Although Bartley manages to resist the holding power of his mother's words, their energy disturbs the cottage, threatening sanity and order to such a degree that there is "no sense left on any person in the house" (p. 13).

As we might expect, Maurya's blessing is regarded with some ambivalence by her children, who have been exposed to literacy and its attendant change in consciousness. They grant that the blessing is powerful; all three make it clear that they want Maurya to give Bartley the traditional benediction—no one else's blessing will do. But even as they seek the blessing, they manage in varying degrees to discredit its power. Bartley wants a hopeful word. He ignores the "hard word" of the woman who is "holding him from the sea," and he waits expectantly for a hope-filled word. Cathleen, too, wants words of hope, even if they do not correspond to reality. She calls her mother's ominous prediction about Bartley's death an "unlucky word," and she suggests that her mother go to the stone well and say something that will make Bartley's

mind "easy." Thus, Maurya's children are still compelled to ask for a blessing in which they no longer believe.

The benediction is a problem not only for Bartley and Cathleen, but also for critics, who have found it difficult to explain why Maurya steadfastly refuses to bless her son. The old woman's account of what happened at the spring well adds to the confusion:

I'm after seeing [Michael] this day and he riding and galloping. Bartley came first on the red mare; and I tried to say "God speed you," but something choked the words in my throat. He went by quickly and "The blessing of God on you," says he and I could say nothing. I looked up then, and I crying, at the grey pony and there was Michael upon it—with fine clothes upon him and new shoes. . . (p. 19)

Based on this passage, critics ordinarily claim that Maurya fails to give Bartley her blessing *because* of her vision of the riders to the sea. Maurice Bourgeois says that the vision "prevented" Maurya from bestowing her blessing on Bartley.⁸ Robin Skelton comments that Maurya is so "astonished by the specter of Michael that she cannot give Bartley her protective blessing."⁹ Errol Durbach asserts that "the prophetic vision of death upon the pale horse renders Maurya incapable of giving her blessing."¹⁰

Such readings, however, overlook an ambiguity in the passage. Maurya's phrase "Bartley came first" can mean either that the young man was the first of two riders or that Bartley passed Maurya before anyone else. Standard critical assessments of the play read first-in-place: that is, Bartley and Michael come at the same time but Bartley is on the first horse. The alternative reading, that "first" means first-in-time (that Maurya sees Bartley alone and then sees Michael), forces us to see five separate actions in the passage:

- (1) Maurya goes out to the well intending to give Bartley both the bread and the blessing;
- (2) Bartley rides toward her and, although she wants to bless him, "something choke[s] the words in [her] throat" (p. 19);
- (3) Bartley rides by and blesses her, but again she can "say nothing";
- (4) She glances down and begins to cry;
- (5) When she looks up, she sees Michael on the gray pony.

This reading—that Maurya refuses to give her blessing to Bartley *before* she has seen the phantom Michael—not only takes into account all of Maurya's words, but also complements an earlier scene in the play. Just as Bartley is about to leave the cottage, he turns around at the door and

waits. Nothing is said, but anyone knowing the Irish custom of blessing a child when he leaves on a journey would hear the silence, would notice the absence of the blessing. For those playgoers who do not know enough to miss the blessing, Synge draws attention to its absence, for he has Cathleen turn and scold her mother with the words: "Why wouldn't you give [Bartley] your blessing and he looking round at the door? Isn't it sorrow enough is on everyone in this house with you sending him out with an unlucky word behind him and a hard word in his ear?" (p. 11).

Taking these passages together, we see that Maurya actually fails to give her blessing to Bartley not once but three times—and all three times occur before she sees the vision of Michael. Certainly, Maurya is shocked by the vision of the phantom rider; when she returns to the cottage, she, the old woman who would be "talking forever," is utterly inarticulate. But the terrible vision is not the *reason* she fails to give her blessing. A more satisfying interpretation of the vision is suggested by Maurya herself: just after Bartley leaves the cottage, Maurya says, "He's gone now, God spare us, and we'll not see him again. He gone now and when the black night is falling, I'll have no son left me in the world" (p. 11).

Maurya, then, has absolute certainty that Bartley will die. Given her traditional orientation and her peasant's reverence for the power of words, pronouncing any blessing in the face of her certainty about Bartley's death would be a sacrilege, a misuse of power, a lie. And the lie chokes in her throat. Thus Maurya's need to withhold her blessing is best explained as an expression of her traditional attitude toward the significance of the word.

Nicholas Grene comments that Maurya's disagreement with Cathleen about what constitutes the "life of a young man" illustrates that the old woman's attitude belongs to "a different order of truth."¹¹ The same might be said of all that Maurya sees, and wants, and thinks. She truly lives in a world apart—and although she struggles valiantly, she is unsuccessful against encroaching modern values which are causing the island to lose its beauty and truth.

The young priest, Maurya's opponent in the cultural conflict of *Riders*, is, like Michael, a phantom. Although he never appears onstage, he is often quoted by the garrulous Nora; thus, we have "lines" for a character who is not listed in the cast. Despite his shadowy nature, the young priest is Maurya's chief foil and adversary. He is her opposite on almost every level: he is young, she is old; he is father, she is mother; he is an outlander, she is a woman of the island; she is very much present

onstage, he speaks but does not appear, and acts but never comes onstage. Even as Maurya is the traditional woman (who, by orientation, custom, and worldview, guards the ways of the island), the young priest is the “modern” man, whose interests are extra-insular, whose ways are alien, and whose worldview is nontraditional.

On the island, the priest speaks with the voice of the modern urban world. Unlike Maurya’s mistrust of, or her children’s enraptured curiosity about, the ways of the mainland, the priest has a comfortably confident attitude toward that world. As a result, he becomes the mediator between the island and the mainland. Thus, the authorities on the mainland give the priest “the shirt and plain stocking were got off [the] drowned man in Donegal” (p. 5). It is the priest’s task to tell the islanders the news from the big world, and his to determine what information will be given and what withheld. Recognizing the priest as their mediator, the villagers show a remarkable deference to his word. Only Maurya offers any real resistance to his authority. She alone refuses to accept his judgment, saying “It’s little the likes of him knows of the sea” (p. 21).¹² The isolation of the islanders may explain their acceptance of the priest as mediator, since he has behind him the authority of the church and of society; nevertheless, their choice is a destructive one, for, by accepting his authority, they fracture their own tradition. The priest, an outlander who has neither age nor experience, tragically ignores the cumulative wisdom of the island.

Everyone on the island is troubled about the dangerous weather and about Bartley’s decision to go to Galway. Among the villagers, it is a topic of general conversation. Cathleen is uneasy about her brother’s departure, and Bartley himself would rather wait than go, for if there were another boat sailing during the week, he says he would take it. Even Nora voices some cause for alarm: she has heard a “great roaring in the west and it’s worse it’ll be getting when the tide’s turned to the wind” (p. 7). Only the priest is unconcerned, and his confidence reflects his modernity. His is not a world filled with inevitabilities. For him—as for us—there are not only multiple courses of action but also multiple ways of thinking about the world (in which multiple possibilities exist as a matter of course). Because of who and what he is, the priest must bring into question what on the island has always been seen as inevitable. A significant difference between folk and urban consciousness is the folk population’s helplessness in the face of reality.¹³ Maurya knows that the sea will take her last son as it has taken all her other sons and the father of her sons. How can she think otherwise? The priest,

with his confidence and his worlds of possibilities, however, also cannot think otherwise than he does.

In this sense, the priest is clearly a philosophical intruder. He is often presented as a religious interloper, a missionary attempting to impose Christian beliefs on the essentially "pagan" islanders; however, too much may have been made of the deep pagan roots of the Aran Islanders. Many of the customs cited as examples of paganism are hardly more than examples of the syncretism that prevails in most religions. It is unconvincing to suggest that the traditional keen (*caoine* in Irish) reflects a persisting belief in druidical death ceremonies, or that mention of *Samhain* (the Celtic name of the harvest month) changes the holy water used at the end of the play into the "magical" water of an earlier era, just as it is unconvincing to say that the practice of decorating a tree at Christmas indicates that contemporary Americans believe in Woden.

In short, I do not believe that the priest interferes with the religious practices of the islanders; however, I *do* think that his Victorian version of Catholicism undermines their traditional philosophy. For example, his notion that God will not leave Maurya destitute is more an expression of Victorian overconfidence than it is an expression of complex biblical faith. This priest, who believes that God permits good things only, may have missed his seminary lessons on the book of Job.

Folk culture is based on the law of limited good: the land is finite, the one son only will die, the sea will be hostile. Insofar as he preaches the message of *unlimited* good, the priest's ideas are foreign to and destructive of the rural culture of the island. When the priest, the representative of progress and the "new" life, holds out the promise of a world without limitation, he fractures the folk vision of the world. Any time a real alternative is introduced into a closed system, the system changes—whether the adherents of the system adopt the change or not. The prophet of unlimited good, a prophet who will return to the mainland, believes (reasonably enough) in progress; however, islanders (whose lives *are* radically limited) will almost inevitably find the message of such a prophet philosophically and empirically inappropriate.¹⁴

Each of Maurya's children shares a part of Maurya's worldview and a part of the young priest's. But it is Nora who has been most completely drawn into the cleric's world. Nora, Maurya's daughter, not only speaks for the priest, but she is also remarkably like him: she is a shadowy character who has little interest in the ways of the island and who is unsympathetic to its philosophy. Our picture of Nora is fuzzy

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because she functions primarily as echo and expositor. Her comments are free of personal content; a good part of what the girl says is simple repetition of the priest's words. Even when Nora is not quoting the priest directly, she rarely editorializes, offering neither reflection nor comment on what she repeats. So, even as she reveals the young priest, Nora hides herself.

Our sense of Nora's character is also blunted by her reportorial mode. Often we find her making flat descriptive statements about people and things: when she hears the "great roaring in the west," it means to her that the weather will get worse—we must infer her concern about Bartley's safety. As a rule, Nora simply states something and leaves it to Maurya or Cathleen to provide depth and significance. Much of Nora's dialogue, moreover, is composed of questions which have self-evident answers: "Where is she?" "Is that it, Bartley?" "What stick?" "Is she gone round by the bush?" When she is asked a question, Nora's answers are generally noncommittal and impersonal, or are quotes from other characters.

Even though Synge made Nora an attendant lady who does little more than swell a scene, she has the marks of a peasant-in-transition. Nora shares with the priest a modern orientation. Her experience is limited, but her interests lie in a world beyond the cottage walls. She comes onstage from outside the cottage, and tells us what the other islanders, Eamon Simon, Stephen Pheety, and Colum Shawn, have been saying. Not only is she always "looking out," away from the cottage, but she also exhibits little awareness of the ordinary and immediate details of the cottage kitchen, with its "nets, oilskins, spinning wheel, and . . . new boards standing by the wall" (p. 5). She rarely shows the sort of knowledge we might expect of a young woman who lives in the cottage. Her constant fumbling and confusion evidence both her basic insecurity and her genuine lack of interest in the island. She is not certain about the stick that Michael brought from Connemara. She has trouble with the new rope: "Where is the bit of new rope?" Bartley asks Cathleen—and it is well that he asks her, for even after Cathleen identifies the rope specifically and has told Nora precisely where it can be found ("Give it to him, Nora, it's on a nail by the white boards" [p. 9]), the younger girl still must get Bartley's confirmation as she hands it to him: "Is that it, Bartley?" she asks. On the one occasion when Nora does know where to find something—"I'll get Michael's shirt off the hook the way we can put one flannel on the other" (p. 15)—she is stymied when she does not find the shirt where

she expects to: "It's not with [the other shirts], Cathleen, and where will it be?" (p. 15).

Similarly, Nora's attitude toward island customs is closer to the young priest's urban, nontraditional ways than to Maurya's folkways. Nora's ignorance about the details of island life hints strongly at her impatience with that life. It is tempting to agree with Alan Price's claim that Nora is "hardly aware that [a battle] is happening."¹⁵ However, given her place in the family (younger daughter) and the likelihood that she will be trapped on the island for a celibate life, Price's assessment may well be wrong. Nora, in fact, may be one of the loci of anger and passion in the play. Unlike Cathleen and Bartley, who are willing to contradict their mother, Nora remains aggressively withdrawn from the old woman. She answers Maurya's questions precisely but without embellishment; she seems, in short, to try to separate herself from both her mother and her mother's world. She is a portrait of an alienated youth.¹⁶

Maurya, obviously sensitive to Nora's aloofness, makes several attempts to penetrate the girl's silence. Although Maurya is harsh with Bartley and Cathleen, she is gentle with her youngest child, never once finding fault with her. In a play that does not often employ direct address, Maurya speaks directly to Nora on four occasions. After Maurya returns from her encounter with the riders to the sea, Cathleen asks her: "Did you see Bartley?" and "What is it you seen?" (p. 19). But Maurya does not respond until *Nora* asks for information. Then the old woman says, "I went down to the spring well, and I stood there saying a prayer to myself. Then Bartley came along and he riding on the red mare with the grey pony behind him. The Son of God spare us, *Nora*" (p. 19). Ironically, *Nora*, who has been called to pray with her mother and invited to share in the dreadful experience, does not even answer. As usual, it is Cathleen, ever curious and ready to listen, who presses for more information.

A few lines later, Maurya recounts (again for *Nora*) her memory of the day Patch's body was washed up by the sea:

There was Patch after was drowned out of a curragh that turned over. I was sitting here with Bartley, and he a baby lying on my two knees, and I seen two women, and three women and four women coming in, and they crossing themselves and not saying a word. I looked out then, and there were men coming after them and they holding a thing in the half of a red sail and water dripping out of it—it was a dry day, *Nora*—and leaving a track to the door. (p. 21)

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This is a direct appeal for Nora's understanding, an expression of the older woman's desire to share not only the tragedy of the past but also the implications of that tragedy with her younger daughter. But Nora does not respond for several minutes. Her next line offers a chilling contrast to Maurya's vital, tragic vision of the voracious sea: "They're carrying a thing among them, and there's water dripping out of it and leaving a track by the big stones" (p. 23). The difference between the two descriptions is remarkable. Maurya has a vivid and precise mastery of the past; Nora's present experience is dull, emotionless, stripped of all but the barest detail.

Maurya has invited Nora to understand, to dream dreams, and to see visions of the old world and the old ways; but the girl, whose interests lie outside the island, remains distant. At the end of the play, despite Maurya's efforts to reclaim her daughter for the traditional world, Nora remains a child of the modern world. She does not rally to Maurya's side or comprehend the traditional vision; she misses the tragedy and, at the end, sees only an old and broken woman whose tears signify nothing more than her partiality for one son—"It's fonder she was of Michael and would anyone have thought that" (p. 25).

Bartley, the "one son only," is the play's exemplary peasant-in-transition. He, more than any other character, is compelled to deal directly with both the traditional culture and the modern world. Though an islander by birth and training, he must, by virtue of economic necessity, be a part-time mainlander. Although Nora may dream of the big world, and although her mother has the freedom to reject that world, Bartley can do neither. He must balance the old and the new, must find some way to reconcile his mother's plea that he live within the limits of the traditional life and the priest's invitation to make the world his island.

It is not surprising that Bartley has difficulty managing his reconciliation. Anthropologist Felix Keesing points out that an individual faced with dual codes of conduct is forced into being "delinquent [with respect to] indigenous rules . . . if he obeys those imposed by the outside authority."¹⁷ Conflicting cultural messages can, ultimately, cause loss of identity. Inevitably, they cause the individual in transition to suffer "dysnomia" or poor integration in both cultures.

On the one hand, Bartley seems comfortable with the ways and customs of the village and the cottage. He knows how to deal with the problems of day-to-day life. He can turn the new rope into a halter for the mare, and he knows when the jobber is coming for the pig with the

black feet. He knows, too, just how long it will take the girls to "get up weed enough for another cock for the kelp" (p. 9). On the other hand, it is obvious that Bartley's basic attitude toward life has already been profoundly influenced by the "outside authority," the big world. Each of Bartley's island concerns is counterpointed by modern interests. He is as aware of the things that will lead him away from the cottage as he is of those things which make the cottage his haven. Bartley has only eight lines in the play; in four of them he speaks of "going." His vision, then, has a double focus.

In other ways, too, Bartley seems something of a misfit in island society. Although he lives on an island where a clock is an oddity, he is fixated on time and numbers; he is preternaturally alert to the passage of hours and days. From him we learn that it has been nine days since Michael was lost at sea, and that the cutter sitting in the harbor is the last for two weeks or more. He assures his mother and sisters that they will see him "coming again in two days or three days or maybe four days" (p. 11). Bartley seems caught between a timeless and a time-bound society.

Bartley is also trapped between disparate philosophical positions: one is his mother's fatalistic conviction that if he goes to Galway, he will most certainly die; the other is the young priest's easy confidence that God will keep him safe. Despite the fact that Bartley throws in his lot with the priest, the youth is far from comfortable with his own choice. Bartley may act like a modern man, but he speaks like a man of the island. As he leaves the cottage on the way down to the cutter, he says to his mother "The blessing of God on you" (p. 11). A short time later, when he passes his mother at the spring well, he utters the same words again. There is more than formula in Bartley's words. In speaking his farewell, he not only blesses but also attempts to compel Maurya to return the blessing. Bartley's uneasy wait at the cottage door for his mother's benediction indicates that he does not leave the island with an easy mind. He longs to have his tradition-bound mother legitimize his decision, to have her utter words that will make his rejection of her beliefs acceptable. He wants, in short, what all those confronted by opposing cultural demands want: the marriage of the conflicting systems that face them.

Of Maurya's children, it is Cathleen who initially seems the least traditional and more resistant to the old ways and beliefs. Not only does she sympathize with the priest and justify Bartley's decision to go to Galway, but she also bickers with her mother. The conflict between the

two women is constant. Although Maurya initiates the edgy interchanges with Cathleen when she faults the girl for bringing more turf down to the fire, Cathleen is quick to respond in kind, arguing, "There's a cake baking at the fire for a short space and Bartley will want it when the tide turns" (p. 7). Later, Cathleen takes her mother to task for being stubborn, complains about her insensitivity toward Bartley, and asserts that the atmosphere of anxiety in the house is Maurya's fault: "There's no sense left on any person in a house where an old woman would be talking forever" (p. 13). But, while Cathleen's contentiousness is certainly a sign of some degree of hostility toward her mother's values, a close look at the girl's actions and words shows that she has a traditional outlook. In some respects, Cathleen is the image of a younger Maurya, and it is she who gives promise that traditional notions will persist on the island for a while longer.

Like Maurya, Cathleen is island-centered. She is the keeper of the hearth. As Price says, we see Cathleen "keeping the home together, now that her mother is beyond [doing] it."¹⁸ When the play opens, it is Cathleen who is tending the fire: Nora has been out to the shore, Bartley has gone to the boat to make plans for his journey, and Maurya has withdrawn for a rest. Both daughters are onstage throughout the play, but Nora is always looking out the window, drawn to the edges of island society, while Cathleen rarely moves away from the hearth. She remains at the center of the little cottage both physically and psychologically: "Hers are the labors of necessity: Cathleen . . . deftly kneads the cake, puts it into the oven and at once begins to spin at the wheel."¹⁹ But Cathleen does more than that which is necessary—she is sensitive to the smallest detail of cottage life. She knows where Michael's shirt is, where the new bit of rope is, where the walking stick is. She is a woman for whom the cottage is the world.

The older girl shares not only Maurya's island-centeredness but also something of her mother's way with words. We have seen that Maurya is an epic maker; Cathleen is a tale shaper, compelled to give each aspect of her world detail and specificity. For Cathleen, Bartley's new bit of rope is "the one on the nail by the white boards" (p. 9), which was hung up only that morning because "the pig with the black feet was eating it" (p. 9). Nora hears a "noise" in the northeast, but it is more than a noise for Cathleen, it is the "sound of someone crying out by the seashore" (p. 21). For her, things are not rootless, as they seem to be for Nora; rather, each has a particular history and each triggers a story. Cathleen consistently moves from the factual into the narrative. While she does not have Maurya's propensity to universalize, she is, like her

mother, concerned with shaping the bits of "insignificant" life into a rounded whole. On different planes of sophistication, both women use words to fit events into a traditional paradigm.

Like her siblings, however, Cathleen exhibits a certain ambivalence about the traditional worldview. She questions the power of her mother's blessing, challenges her authority, supports Bartley's right to pursue his decision to go to Galway, and is generally frustrated by the traditional wisdom that brings anxiety into the cottage. But there are subtle ways in which Cathleen's outlook is still genuinely traditional. Her language suggests that Cathleen longs to fix her place in the world and to stabilize a life that is being uprooted. Maurya simply rejects the modern culture, Nora has capitulated, and Bartley is close to repudiating the island ways. Cathleen is torn; she questions almost everything.

Ultimately, however, it is Cathleen's response to her mother's vision which is the best indicator of the girl's folk orientation. Her response to the vision is critical, for, as Grene correctly points out, the vision is the "center of the plan."²⁰ For Maurya, as I have demonstrated above, the vision is the ghostly incarnation of a certainty she has had all along. The riders to the sea confirm her conviction about the doom she knows Bartley faces. To her, the vision offers nothing new at all; nevertheless, it presents a new sort of "evidence" to those who, throughout the play, have ignored her "dark word." Grene's claim, however, that "no one in the play questions [the] reality [of the vision]"²¹ is not entirely true. Perhaps we can presume that the villagers, who apparently believe in the vision that Bride Dara had, will believe in Maurya's vision also. But it is unlikely that the young priest will grant credence to Maurya's account. Besides, the response of both the villagers and the priest is moot, since during the course of the play they do not hear about the vision. Maurya tells only Nora and Cathleen. And contrary to what Grene says, Nora *does* question the account, though in an indirect way. She says, "Didn't the young priest say Almighty God would not leave her destitute with no son living?" (p. 19). How, she implies, can this vision be believed, given that the young priest has promised that God will keep Bartley safe? Nora's apparent reliance on the promise of the young priest is yet another example of her passive resistance to her mother.

In the final analysis, then, Cathleen alone does not question her mother's vision. And Cathleen believes in it with the same unquestioning certainty that has been Maurya's all along. The fossilized image Nora used early in the play about the cake in the fire—"And it's *destroyed*

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[Bartley]’ll be going till dark night, and he after eating nothing since the sun went up” (p. 13, emphasis added)—is given its full literal weight when Cathleen cries out: “It’s *destroyed* we are from this day. It’s *destroyed*, surely” (p. 19, emphasis added).

We have seen that Maurya makes a special effort to engage Nora’s interest and support. That Maurya does not make a similar effort with Cathleen suggests that she is more sure of Cathleen. The older girl does not need to be invited to participate in the traditional vision or accept the traditional ways. In the end, Cathleen believes even as Maurya believes.

Riders to the Sea, then, is much more than a naive tale about a group of noble primitives. It is an account of a cultural battle, a battle whose tragic outcome is as predictable as is the death of Bartley. Viewing the play as a psychologically accurate representation of turn-of-the-century Irish peasants, rather than as an idyllic, romanticized picture of them, expands our understanding of the characters, offers new and revelatory insight into the interaction among them, and provides a fresh explanation for Maurya’s way of dealing with Bartley. It is to Synge’s credit that he so honestly and accurately portrayed conflicts that he consciously denied. It is, I believe, that shattering accuracy which gives to the play “the depth and resonance of a major work of art.”²²

¹ The early critic Maurice Bourgeois comments that Synge’s plays grow out of a “rich mass of painstaking social observation.” *John Millington Synge and the Irish Theatre* (London, 1913; rpt. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1965), p. 22. Bourgeois, however, does not provide much textual analysis of the plays. Donna Gerstenberger says “*Riders* does not concern itself with social issues,” in *John Millington Synge* (New York: Twayne, 1964), p. 45. Other critical assessments of *Riders* do not deal directly with the anthropological issues in the play.

² See Marion Levy, *Modernization and the Structure of Modern Societies* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 128 ff. Peter Berger, Brigitte Berger, and Hansfried Kellner explain in this way the changes in consciousness that modernization triggers: “The institutional pluralization of modernity had to carry in its wake a fragmentation and ipso facto weakening of every conceivable belief and value dependent on social support. The typical situation in which the individual finds himself in traditional society is one where there are highly reliable plausibility structures (i.e., social confirmation of beliefs about reality). Conversely, modern societies are characterized by unstable, incohesive, unreliable plausibility structures.” See *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (New York: Random House, 1973), p. 19. The conflict of the two sets of structures is unavoidable. Thus, even if an individual does not accept the alternative worldview, his stable world has been brought into question by the existence of an alternative.

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³ William Butler Yeats, *Essays and Introductions* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), p. 383.

⁴ John Millington Synge, *Riders to the Sea*, in *J. M. Synge: Collected Works*. Vol. III, Book I, ed. Ann Saddlemeyer (1968), gen. ed. Robin Skelton (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1962–1968), p. 13; all references are given parenthetically in the text.

⁵ Conrad Arensberg and Solon T. Kimball, *Family and Community in Ireland*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968), p. 163.

⁶ Fletcher Stewart Basset, *Legends and Superstitions of the Sea* (Chicago: Bedford, Clarke, 1885), p. 225.

⁷ Declan Kiebert says that this statement shows Maurya's "stern grasp of priorities—men before horses." See his interesting *Synge and the Irish Language* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1979), p. 99.

⁸ Bourgeois asserts: "When Maurya hastens away to bestow her blessing on Bartley [she] is prevented from doing so by her otherworld, 'spae-wife'-like, vision of dead Michael" (*John Millington Synge*, p. 161).

⁹ Robin Skelton, *The Writings of John Millington Synge* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), p. 47.

¹⁰ Errol Dürbach, "Synge's Tragic Vision of the Old Mother and the Sea," *Modern Drama*, 14, No. 4 (1972), 364. Other critics have interpreted Maurya's silence in a similar way. D. S. Neff claims that "[Maurya's] conciliatory efforts are interrupted by her frightening confrontation with Michael's ghost at the spring well." See "Synge's Hecuba," *Eire-Ireland*, 19 (1984), 84–85. See also T. R. Henn, "Riders to the Sea: A Note," in *Sunshine and the Moon's Delight: A Centenary Tribute to John Millington Synge, 1871–1909*, ed. Suheil Badi Bushrui (Gerrard's Cross, Bucks: Colin Smythe, 1972), pp. 37–38; Ryder Currie and Martin Bryan, "Riders to the Sea: Reappraised," *Texas Quarterly*, 2 (1968), 145.

¹¹ Nicholas Grene, *Synge, A Critical Study of the Plays* (London: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 48 and 50.

¹² Grene comments, "To Maurya [the priest] is no more than an ignorant young man speaking empty words of comfort" (*ibid.*, p. 55).

¹³ Peter Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1979), pp. 13–14.

¹⁴ On the notion of radical limitation, George M. Foster has this to say: "Peasant economy is essentially non-productive; peasants ordinarily are very poor people. Their resources, particularly land, usually are absolutely limited, and there is not enough to go around. Productive techniques, based on human and animal power and the simple tools first used before the time of Christ, are essentially static. Consequently, production is constant . . . the total 'productive pie' of the village does not greatly change, and . . . there is no way to increase it however hard the individual works unless new land and improved techniques become available." *Traditional Cultures and the Impact of Technological Change* (New York: Harper, 1962), pp. 52–53.

¹⁵ Alan Price, *Synge and Anglo Irish Drama* (London: Methuen, 1961), p. 182.

¹⁶ For this insight into Nora's character, I must thank Professor Michael Kane, Department of Theatre and Dance, California State University, Fullerton. Private communication, September 1989.

¹⁷ Felix Keesing, *Culture Change: An Analysis and Bibliography of Anthropological Sources to 1952* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, n.d.), p. 85.

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¹⁸ Price, *Synge and Anglo Irish Drama*, p. 187.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

²⁰ Grene, *Synge*, p. 46.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 55.

Pound's “‘Metro’ Hokku”: The Evolution of an Image

RANDOLPH CHILTON
AND
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Most readers of Ezra Pound are familiar with at least two versions of “In a Station of the Metro”: the original published version, which appeared in *Poetry* in 1913, and a revised version published in *Personae* (1926).¹ In fact, a number of drafts and revisions Pound wrote before and between these two versions suggest both his concern for the poem’s particular form and his sense of its significance in his published work. The *Poetry* version is notable in its typography, broken into blocks of words and punctuation marks divided by unusually wide spaces, giving the impression of several separate units in each line:

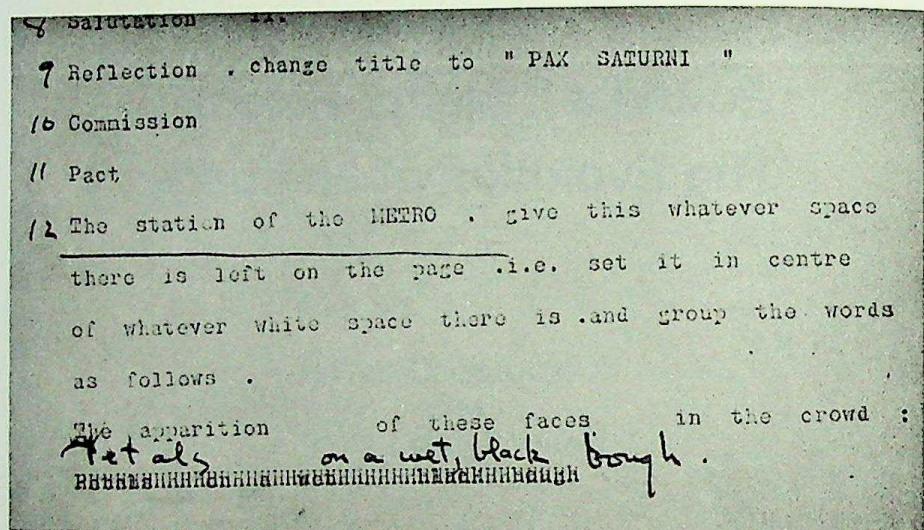
IN A STATION OF THE METRO

The apparition of these faces in the crowd :
Petals on a wet, black bough .

Ezra Pound

In an earlier letter, however, Pound sent Harriet Monroe a draft with a slightly different spacing:

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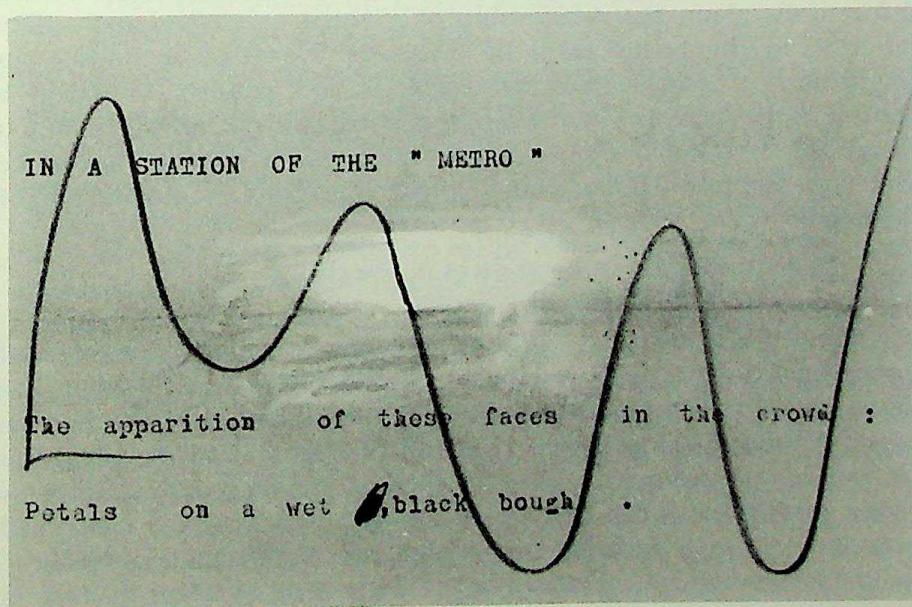
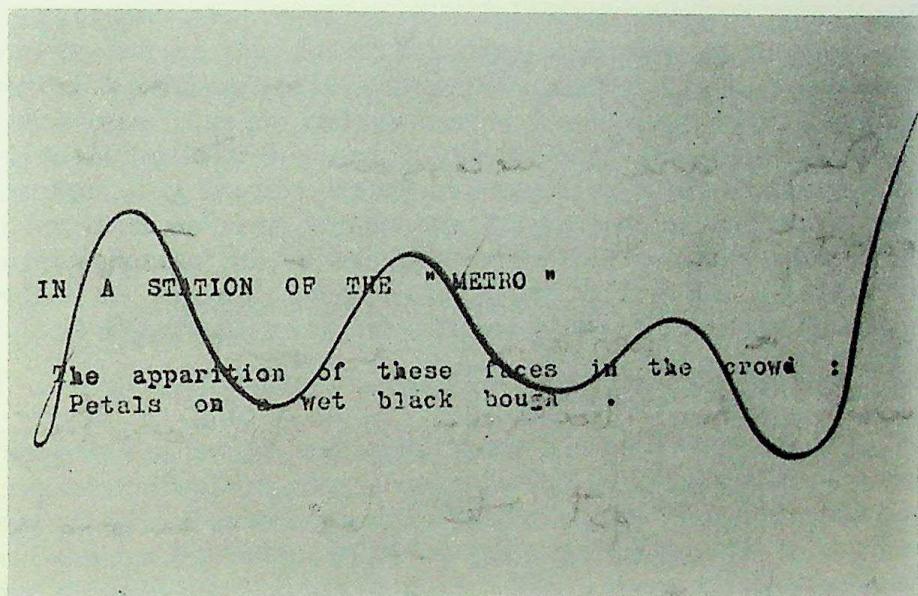


This version appears at the bottom of a letter to Monroe which is undated but written after Pound had submitted "Contemporania," the group of poems including "In a Station of the Metro."² The spacing and typesetting were of special interest to Pound; he types the poem with explicit instructions about its typography and placement—on the page and in the order of the poems. When Hugh Kenner, in *The Pound Era*,³ reprints Pound's spacing in this version, though, it appears as follows:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
Petals on a wet, black bough.

Kenner may very well have made the right guess about the spacing—if "bough" was to have been clearly isolated, surely Pound would have been careful to make that obvious. Still, a close examination of the version published in *Poetry* shows that Monroe tried to reproduce exactly Pound's handwritten spacing, indicating somewhat less space between the last two words of the second line than between the first two. When Monroe wrote Pound in early 1913 to question him about his spacings, he replied emphatically in March that in his "METRO hokku" he was "careful . . . to indicate spaces between the rhythmic units, and [that he wanted] them observed."⁴

Two other apparently early drafts of the poem (also in the *Poetry Magazine Collection*), which have been typed and then crossed out in pencil, appear on the verso of each of two sheets of a handwritten letter concerning "Contemporania." The order of their composition is not clear, but they appear on the page like this:



Despite all these variants, Pound's "hokku," in its next published form, looked virtually identical to the *Poetry* version.⁵

The March 1913 letter to Monroe contained what may be Pound's

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first written comment on his intent in the poem; the next variants appear in more extended, published discussions of the poem's composition. In *T.P.'s Weekly* of June 6, 1913, Pound explains his "Impulse" to write and his technique of writing, and ends by narrating the genesis of this haiku. After seeing beautiful faces in the Paris Underground, he says, he tried to articulate his experience and ended with "nothing but spots of colour" until, months later, he remembered the Japanese tradition, "where sixteen syllables [sic] are counted enough for a poem if you arrange and punctuate them properly." Here the poem appears with the spacing and punctuation regularized:⁶

"The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
"Petals on a wet, black bough."

In the essay "Vorticism," which originally appeared in *Fortnightly Review* in September 1914, Pound again narrates his Metro experience and talks of the difficulty of finding "words that seemed . . . worthy, or as lovely as that sudden emotion." In this essay, Pound extends his discussion of the poem's evolution, and rather than focusing on "rhythmic units" as he did in the Monroe letter, writes more theoretically about the relationship of a visual and emotional reality reflected in the poetic form he discovers. He talks of finding an "equation . . . in little splotches of colour," a "'pattern,' or hardly a pattern, if by 'pattern' you mean something with a 'repeat' in it," a "language in colour." Pound publishes in this essay the "hokku-like sentence" that resulted, but what he prints is in effect another version of the poem:⁷

"The apparition of these faces in the crowd :
Petals, on a wet, black bough."

Here the comma replaces the spacing after "Petals" in the indented second line; the extraordinary spaces, as in the *T.P.'s Weekly* version, are eliminated. Typographical conventions of the time or of the journal might explain the single space preceding the colon and the quotation marks around the poem. But "Vorticism" was not only written by Pound (unlike the *T.P.'s Weekly* interview) but was explicitly concerned with the mechanics and effects of his poetry, so it seems reasonable to assume he would have taken care with the typography of his "hokku" in that essay. Furthermore, when Pound reprinted "Vorticism" in *Gaudier-Brzeska*, a book of some personal importance to him, the poem appeared as it had in the *Fortnightly Review* article.⁸

Interestingly, the next variant of the poem appeared between the 1914 publication of the *Fortnightly Review* article and the first edition of

POUND'S "‘METRO’ HOKKU"

Gaudier-Brzeska in 1916. In November 1915, Pound included “In a Station of the Metro” in *Catholic Anthology*. No credit is given to an editor of that volume (in a note on the title page an anonymous “assembler” thanks the various journals that have originally printed the poems), but we know from Pound’s letters that he produced it.⁹ In the *Anthology*, the poem appears in a relatively conventional haiku form for English verse (though it does not strictly obey the syllabic or linear conventions):¹⁰

The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
Petals on a wet, black bough.

Pound could have stopped revising the poem after producing this version: it emulates an Eastern haiku, an effect Pound explicitly wanted;¹¹ it retains the spare, condensed presentation the imagists aspired to; and its structure and punctuation are consistent with other imagistic poems Pound wrote in this period (particularly “April,” “Gentildonna,” and “Liu Ch’e”).¹² Still, when *Lustra* appeared in the fall of 1916, the poem contained one last, important change in punctuation:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

The change from a colon to a semicolon at the end of the first line may be a proofreader’s or printer’s error; Hugh Kenner has said in conversation that British proofreaders in this period were notoriously inaccurate. However, we have already noted Pound’s written comments on this poem, which illustrate the care he took with its exact form and the poem’s growing importance in his work.¹³ And once this version appeared in *Lustra*, Pound did not change its form in any subsequent printing. In any case, the semicolon—whether introduced by Pound or by a printer—remained.

With the semicolon, the poem resists explication even more than with the colon: it is not logical discourse, and it is not, in any conventional sense, metaphor. Its very syntax (or syntactic irregularity) prevents us from seeing it in either of those ways. We can describe the language superficially: two noun clusters (grammatical fragments, actually, even though Pound referred to the poem as a “sentence”);¹⁴ a collection of descriptive words that create a picture (or rather two pictures); and a possible metaphor in the word “apparition.” The poem’s structure tempts us to read a metaphorical connection between the first picture and the second—between the faces and the petals. But the semicolon prevents an explicit connection, and as soon as we try to specify or paraphrase a connection, it disappears.¹⁵ In fact, the use of

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the semicolon in this poem is entirely consistent with the kind of theoretical reasoning Pound was beginning to do in 1914 in "Vorticism," where he shifted his emphasis from "rhythmic units" to the relation between ideas. Though the version of the poem in that essay contains a colon and no extraordinary spacing,¹⁶ Pound describes it there in terms of an effect that is made more pronounced by the substitution of the semicolon: the poem's final version is "a form of super-position, that is to say, it is one idea set on top of another."¹⁷

In the paragraph preceding the discussion of super-position of ideas in "Vorticism," Pound relates the story of a Japanese naval officer who composed a spontaneous poem when he happened upon cat-tracks in the snow; Pound translates the poem as follows:

"The footsteps of the cat upon the snow:
(are like) plum-blossoms."

Pound explains that "the words 'are like' would not occur in the original, but I add them for clarity"¹⁸—in other words, that the colon implies a metaphor, but that the metaphor always remains implicit in the Japanese. The implicit metaphor is a central device in "the language of exploration," which the Japanese haiku exemplified, according to Pound, and which his own two-line poem emulated. Eventually, though, even the implicit metaphor is too fixed a connection for such language. Thus, two years after publishing "Vorticism," Pound changes the punctuation in his much discussed haiku from a colon—which is the equivalent in punctuation of "is like" in language—to a semicolon, which juxtaposes the phrases without clearly expressing their relationship.

The final, semicolon version of "In a Station of the Metro" clearly demonstrates the principle of "direct treatment of the 'thing'" itself, as the imagist manifesto demands:¹⁹ the poem resists the overt declaration of the poet's intellectual or imaginative activity, resists making verbally explicit the poet's mental act of connecting images perceived in the phenomenal world, or relating them to images re-created in the poet's imagination.²⁰ So in this couplet, the poet does not say that the faces in the crowd *are* petals or even that they are *like* petals; nor does he say that they themselves are an "apparition." Rather, he places before us, in two brief non-predicating sentence fragments, a collocation of images held in suspension and apprehended nearly simultaneously: the "apparition of these faces" (italics added), as if this perception were only a ghost of his literal, visual impression of the faces in memory; the faces themselves as part of a literal scene suggested by the poem's title; the

faces against the backdrop of the literal crowd of Metro-riders; the imagined petals; and these petals seen against the imagined backdrop of the "wet, black bough."²¹ Rather than giving us an equation or a comparison, the poet gives us, as Pound writes in "Vorticism," an image that is "itself the speech. The image is the word beyond formulated language."²²

Pound goes on to argue in "Vorticism" that this kind of "one image poem" records "the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective."²³ Again, though Pound is not talking here about the final, semicolon version of the poem, he anticipates it, for it even more effectively accomplishes this transformation. In Pound's words, the "thing outward" *itself*, and not the poet, "transforms *itself*" (italics added) or *itself* "darts into a thing inward and subjective": in other words, the transformation takes place in the poet's mind without the poet's conscious effort.²⁴ The final version's semicolon signals the imagist poet's refusal to make explicit assertions that would effect such a transformation for the reader. Instead, the reader is confronted with the outward image and the inward image juxtaposed, and the "darting" of the outer image "into" the inner image must be reenacted in the reader's mind—in the mental leap across the semicolon.

Juxtaposed, the poem's lines borrow associations and emotional overtones from one another, but the semicolon prevents us from defining the connection. The semicolon both invites and resists our uniting of the first line with the second, however we are inclined to do that—logically, rhetorically, or metaphorically. We are left with a double evocation of freshness set against a stale city routine, delicate beauty set against sodden, mundane dullness. Such juxtapositions reappear in works throughout Pound's canon. In "Grace Before Song," the first poem in *A Lume Spento*, Pound asks that "As bright white drops upon a leaden sea / Grant so my songs to this grey folk may be."²⁵ In "Laudantes Decem Pulchritudinis Johanna Temple," Pound uses an image similar to that in "In a Station of the Metro," though less condensed:²⁶

the perfect faces which I see at times
When my eyes are closed—
Faces fragile, pale, yet flushed a little, like petals of roses.

The poet in "Horae Beatae Inscriptio" exclaims in abstract language what "In a Station of the Metro" enacts imagistically:²⁷

How will this beauty, when I am far hence,

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Sweep back upon me and engulf my mind!

In *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, oppositions of classic beauty to the “tawdry newness” of contemporary England occur too often to list completely; Mauberley’s central problem can be seen as an inability to reconcile the disjuncture between the beautiful and a corrupt, materialistic society. And in his last complete Canto (CXVI), Pound seems to put his whole literary career in the context of such images: “the record / the palimpsest” is, at least in part, “a little light in great darkness,” “The vision of the Madonna / above the cigar butts / and over the portal.” Then, almost as a gloss to “In a Station of the Metro,” Pound writes: “How came beauty against this blackness.”²⁸

With its semicolon holding at arm’s length its two honed lines, “In a Station of the Metro” captures this Poundian revelation in the most extreme demonstration of the imagist aesthetic,²⁹ in which, as imagist Richard Aldington wrote in 1914, “We convey an emotion by presenting the object and circumstance of that emotion *without comment*” (italics added).³⁰ The poem is both delicate and hard: the image of a momentary, simultaneous perception of two things juxtaposed in the mind’s eye, and at the same time a formal demonstration of “A hardness, as of cut stone,”³¹ the couplet’s spareness and lack of connectors making each word a separate mark of the chisel in marble.

This poem’s resistance to explication is instructive both for the study of Pound’s modernism and for the study of poetic language in general. The semicolon generates the particular Poundian image that is a “vortex,” “from which, and through which, and into which,” in Pound’s definition, “ideas are constantly rushing.”³² The instability the semicolon gives to the poem turns out to be the poem’s strength, its vorticist dynamic. The final version of the poem marks both a break from conventional nineteenth-century narrative, aesthetic, and metaphorical continuities, and a beginning point for fragmented, problematic longer poems such as *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* and the *Cantos*. Pound’s formal experiments with “In a Station of the Metro” over a three-year period trace, then, not only a struggle with “rhythmic” units or visual appeal, but the difficult evolution of his genuinely modernist poetic.

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Pound; to the Joseph Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago for permission to reproduce the unpublished versions of the poem; to Jonathan Walters at the Regenstein Library for his valuable help; and especially to A. Walton Litz of Princeton University for his generous teaching and kind criticism.

¹ Poetry, Apr. 1913, p. 12; Personae: *The Collected Earlier Poems* (1926; rpt. New York: New Directions, 1971), p. 109.

² From an undated letter in the Poetry Magazine Papers at the Regenstein Library, University of Chicago. This and the two other photographically reproduced typescripts are used with the permission of the Regenstein Library and New Directions.

³ Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1971), p. 197.

⁴ Letter No. 16, dated 30 Mar. 1913, in *Selected Letters of Ezra Pound*, ed. D. D. Paige (New York: Harcourt, 1950), p. 53. Paige may have misdated this letter. At the top of the original letter in the Regenstein Library, the date "10/3/13" (Mar. 10, 1913) has been inscribed (although not in Pound's hand). We should also note that Pound at this time consistently typed two spaces between words, and between words and punctuation marks, even in his prose.

⁵ See *The New Freewoman*, 15 Aug. 1913, pp. 87-88. In this variant, the words are grouped as in the Poetry version, but the spacing between the groups of words appears to be equal.

⁶ *T.P.'s Weekly* (London), 6 June 1913, p. 707. Steve Ellis ("The Punctuation of 'In a Station of the Metro,'" *Paideuma*, 18 [Winter 1989], 205) speculates that this "publication's lay-out of three narrow columns to the page" demanded the regularization of spacing. Pound's control over the typography of the poem in these and other popular journals is highly questionable, but these versions do show that the semicolon did not appear until 1917. In one other interesting variant following an interview with Pound in London's *Daily News and Leader*, 18 Mar. 1914, p. 14, the first line ends with a period:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd.

Petals on a wet black bough.

⁷ Ezra Pound, "Vorticism," *Fortnightly Review*, 1 Sept. 1914, pp. 465-67.

⁸ Ezra Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska* (1916; rpt. New York: New Directions, 1970). The New Directions edition adds some material to the original edition, but reprints "Vorticism" unchanged.

⁹ Paige, *Selected Letters*, No. 64, p. 55.

¹⁰ *Catholic Anthology* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1915), p. 89.

¹¹ It is in the March 1913 letter to Monroe that he first calls the poem a "hokku"; in the "Vorticism" essay, he calls it a "hokku-like sentence," as we have noted.

¹² In these poems, the first lines describe or narrate a literal scene and end with a colon, which is followed by an imaginative image appearing as a single last line. "In a Station of the Metro" is Pound's only poem of this structure, which is limited to two lines. His only other couplet poem of this period,

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"Alba"—because it takes the form of a simile which makes the connection between the two lines explicit (with the first line the vehicle and the second the tenor)—moves away from the "super-position" or juxtaposition of "In a Station of the Metro," "Liu Ch'e," "April," and "Gentildonna," and reverses the order of the literal and metaphorical presentation. See *Personae: The Collected Shorter Poems of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1971), pp. 92, 108–09. T. S. Eliot (*Ezra Pound: His Metric and Poetry* [New York: Knopf, 1917], p. 22; rpt. *To Criticize the Critic* [New York: Farrar, 1965], pp. 176–77) reminds us that many of these poems appeared in *Poetry* before Mrs. Fenollosa turned over her husband's manuscripts to Pound, so this elliptical technique preceded the Fenollosa influence. Interestingly, the two Japanese haiku that Pound reprints in "Vorticism" (p. 467)—apparently in his own translations—are two-line poems in the same form as the earlier versions of "In a Station of the Metro," with the first line a literal scene ending in a colon, and the second line a brief metaphorical equivalent of the literal scene.

¹³ In the undated letter to Monroe about "Contemporania," for example, Pound shifts the order of the poems, placing what he labels "The station of the METRO" last among the twelve poems and commenting: "give this whatever space there is left on the page i.e. set it in centre of whatever white space there is and group the words as follows ." What follows is the manuscript version reproduced in our second paragraph.

¹⁴ Pound, "Vorticism," p. 467.

¹⁵ In his article "The Punctuation of 'In a Station of the Metro,'" published after this article was accepted for publication, Ellis reprints or describes all of the published versions of the poem. He notes that the colon indicated that the first line was incomplete, a "prologue" to the second line; and he argues that with the semicolon, the relationship between the two lines is arguably "not only more subtle but even more equivocal" than in the earlier versions, and that the new punctuation "assists the first line in overturning its subordinate position and becoming foregrounded itself" (p. 206). Ellis discusses the poem's publication history in the context of critical misreadings and classroom readings, in order to argue that the semicolon resists privileging either line and opens up the interpretation of the poem. We complete the record of the poem's genesis by printing the unpublished versions, and we argue that the poem's final form is a profound expression of Pound's imagist and vorticist aesthetics.

¹⁶ Kenner (*The Pound Era*, p. 197) attributes to typesetters all closing up of the spaces in the versions of the poem after the letter to Harriet Monroe, but Pound worked very closely with his publisher Elkin Mathews in London, and surely had access to the proofs of *Catholic Anthology* and *Lustra*, at least.

¹⁷ Pound, "Vorticism," p. 467.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ F. S. Flint, "Imagisme," *Poetry*, Mar. 1913, p. 199. Pound reprinted these "Don'ts" of imagism in "A Retrospect," *Pavannes and Divisions* (1918; rpt. *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot [New York: New Directions, 1935]), p. 3.

²⁰ In *The Pound Era* (pp. 184–87), Kenner discusses the poem's structure at some length, arguing that the "plot" of the poem is the "mind's activity, fetching some new thing into the field of consciousness," but it is an "invisible action," with the poem merely "setting some other seen thing into relation." In discussing the typographic and metric qualities of the poem, Kenner writes that

the words of the poem are "raised by prosody to attention" and thus "assert themselves as words," as in "the Symbolist formula." Michael F. Harper ("The Revolution of the Word," *Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams: The University of Pennsylvania Conference Papers*, ed. Daniel Hoffman [Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1983], pp. 87–90) argues with Kenner's implication "that Pound embraced the Symbolist formula of 'words set free in new structure,' that Pound's poems are generated by words"; according to Harper, Pound "had no interest in autonomous structures of words" and carefully distinguished Imagism from Symbolism, being concerned with finding an equation for the presentation of "the thing," rather than searching for "words set free" of a reality external to the text. In fact, the shifts in typography (especially spacing) and punctuation of the poem suggest that Pound was concerned with words as rhythmic units in the early versions, but that this concern receded later. In the later versions he focused on the relation between images, and on producing an "intellectual and emotional complex." The referential claims of such poetry, though, remain problematic. For a deconstructive approach, see Joseph Riddel's "Pound and the Decentered Image," *Georgia Review*, 29 (1975), 565–91.

²¹ Herbert Schneidau, in *Ezra Pound: The Image and the Real* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1969), asks if it is "not more illuminating to say that the second line of the *Metro* poem . . . acts as some sort of predication about the first line . . . than as a mere analogy of it?" (p. 64). But Schneidau understands "predication" in a special sense. For him, Pound's poetry is "verbal" in that it seeks to establish relations among things, relations not of similarities and differences, but of action and interaction. Nouns become "verbal" when we understand the things in terms of what they do. In any case, "In a Station of the Metro" foregrounds the relationship between its two lines by omitting any verbs and supplanting them with a semicolon. The result is a tentative relationship—a relationship the poem itself puts in question even as it suggests it. The poem makes that relationship its real subject, even as it disallows any final articulation of it.

²² Pound, "Vorticism," p. 466.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 467.

²⁴ Harper ("The Revolution of the Word," pp. 90–91) discusses this process in slightly different terms.

²⁵ Ezra Pound, *A Lume Spento* (1908), rpt. *The Collected Early Poems of Ezra Pound*, ed. Michael J. King (New York: New Directions, 1976), p. 7.

²⁶ Ezra Pound, *Exultations* (1909), rpt. *The Collected Early Poems*, p. 119. K. K. Ruthven, in *A Guide to Ezra Pound's Personae* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1969), p. 153, makes this connection.

²⁷ Ezra Pound, *Canzoni* (1911), rpt. *Personae*, p. 51.

²⁸ *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1972), pp. 795–96.

²⁹ Harper ("The Revolution of the Word," p. 91) calls this poem the "epitome of Imagist technique"; Kenner (*The Pound Era*, pp. 183–84) calls it "the most famous of all Imagist poems." Though Pound did not include "In a Station of the Metro" in *Des Imagistes* in 1914, he refers to it repeatedly in one of its earlier forms as the definitive example of imagist poetry, as we have seen. See also "The Imagistes," *A Talk With Mr. Ezra Pound, Their Editor*, "Daily News and Leader" (London), 18 Mar. 1914, p. 14; rpt. *Ezra Pound and Dorothy*

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Shakespear, Their Letters: 1909–1914, ed. Omar Pound and A. Walton Litz (New York: New Directions, 1984), pp. 323–26.

³⁰ Richard Aldington, “Modern Poetry and the Imagists,” *Egoist*, 1 June 1914, p. 202.

³¹ *Ibid.* Pound, of course, thought Aldington and the other “Amygists” had forsaken the very aesthetic he had hoped to establish through “Imagism.” In response, he published “Vorticism” in September of 1914. As David Perkins points out, Pound always thought of the Image as a “complex,” while Aldington’s “concept of the Image is wavering toward a much simpler notion, that of a clear, quick rendering of particulars without commentary” (*A History of Modern Poetry* [Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Belknap Press, 1976], p. 335).

³² Pound, “Vorticism,” p. 469.

